

C R O W D S

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C R O W D S

*The Stadium as a Ritual
of Intensity*

H A N S U L R I C H G U M B R E C H T

T R A N S L A T E D B Y E M I L Y G O O D L I N G

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CONTENTS

*About the Present and the Presence of Crowds: Preface
to the English Translation of a German Book* vii

- 1 Empty Stadiums 1
- 2 Stadium-Masses 14
- 3 The Contempt for the Masses 30
- 4 Masses of the Past 45
- 5 In the Crowd—Laterally: Swarms,
Mirror Neurons, Primates 62
- 6 In the Crowd—Vertically: Mystical Bodies,
Intensity, Transfiguration 76
- 7 The Stadium as Ritual of the Crowd 94
- 8 “You’ll Never Walk Alone”: Dortmund,
March 13, 2016 107

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ABOUT THE PRESENT AND PRESENCE OF CROWDS

*Preface to the English Translation
of a German Book*

It is Wednesday, January 13, 2021, as I am starting to write this text, and crowds are on everybody's mind, at least in the United States, exactly one week after supporters of President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol building in Washington—and might have had a chance to take over the political power in our country. I am also writing exactly a week before President-Elect Joe Biden will be sworn in at the same highly symbolic place. Media commentators seemed to agree, right from the start, in their use of the word *mob* with its irreversibly negative connotations in reference to the group of people who, without any obvious, physically present leader, took over that menacing role of agency. Much more positive, even charismatic concepts could have surfaced to describe a similar configuration of bodies and their movements, had they been seen from a perspective of approval or enthusiasm. What, by contrast, never changes in such situations is the incapacity to analyze the form and to

capture the regularities of crowd behavior. Only yesterday, for example, the *Science* supplement of the *New York Times* published a lengthy essay on last week's events, correctly quoting an 1892 book by Gustave le Bon as the historically first attempt at understanding the mechanisms of crowd behavior, in order to finally state that no substantial progress in their analysis has been made ever since. My book, written during the early months of the coronavirus pandemic, immodestly claims to facilitate such intellectual progress by developing a number of pertinent new concepts and angles of reflection in relation to crowds. It thus resonates with one dimension of our historically specific present.

Strong crowd events have also occurred on the opposite end of the American political spectrum since the assassination of George Floyd by three policemen last May. With their physical presence, young people above all claimed the right to be seen and heard, in the literal sense of these words, cutting short structures of mediation and representation whose democratic functioning they no longer trust. What the "Black Lives Matter" and the "Make America Great Again" manifestations share, however, despite their radically different focus and goals, is their contested place in a new social environment where State decisions and State instructions clearly prohibit assemblies of such size, as a measure to curb the spread of the coronavirus. Whether the crowd- and presence-phobic time of the pandemic produces a particularly strong, energizing desire to be in a crowd, a desire that would explain the political prominence of crowds

today, or whether the State organs are simply less prepared than they used to be in pre-pandemic times to handle and dissolve them, is not clear yet. But as there seems to be no doubt that the official closure of public spaces for crowds in coronavirus times impacts their emergence and most likely also their tonality, the pandemic must be referred to as a second condition in our present with a relevance for the topic crowds.

While these two mutually intertwined dimensions of the contemporary environment will inevitably condition and change the reception among English-language readers of what I wrote about a year ago, neither the pandemic nor the most recent crowd manifestations belonged to my original project. Rather, I had primarily thought—and still think—of *Crowds* as a supplement to my book *In Praise of Athletic Beauty* from 2006 in which I tried to show that watching athletic events, in different constellations and with different sports as their objects, can be described as a case of aesthetic experience in the most classical (indeed in the Kantian) sense of these words. Counter to our general and mostly preconscious habit of exclusively associating aesthetic experience with interpretation as meaning attribution, however, I proposed to call “aesthetic” any relationship to the world in which meaning attribution oscillates with what I call “presence,” that is with a connection between the materiality of objects and the bodily dimension of human existence. It is this bodily and spatial side of our lives that I had conceptually unfolded in a previous book under the title *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*.

Presence, of course, is not exclusive to the experience of sports as aesthetic experience—it also plays a (perhaps less patent) role when we listen to music, concentrate on an artwork, and even read a novel. On the other hand, presence can exist independently of its oscillation with meaning, in which case it does not contribute to aesthetic experience. In order to drive a car, for example, we need to be in a presence relationship with our material environment, but it would be dangerous if that relationship were permeated by and would oscillate with meaning. In the case of sports, the typical spectator would not necessarily like to associate herself with aesthetic experience—precisely because of the deeply rooted prejudice and practice according to which aesthetic experience is purely interpretative. This is precisely where the project of this book started: in addition to the analysis of different sports as objects of aesthetic experience offered by *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, I wanted to focus on the bodily behavior of spectators present in a stadium—and I wanted to do so for two main reasons.

In the first place I felt that their behavior, as crowd behavior, could make more visible certain physical aspects on the reception side of aesthetic experience that we tend to bracket when we listen to music, see art, or read literature. Secondly, I believe that crowds may serve as a core case in understanding a type of sociability that sociology, for complex historical reasons, has never concentrated upon: that is, a relationship among humans that integrates their bodies, their presence, and the space that

both require, instead of being exclusively based on meanings and on the human mind. Following an ancient tradition in Christian theology, I am referring to this form of assembly as “mystical bodies,” hoping that their description and analysis can provide a layer of concepts that are still lacking in the phenomenology offered by *Production of Presence*. So while it by no means requires a knowledge of my earlier books, the present text thus supplements both *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, as an aesthetic of presence developed with a focus on sports, and *Production of Presence*, as an epistemological and conceptual matrix.

But if recent events and trajectories have given a specific status to this agenda, the particular circumstances that first motivated me to write a short book about crowds and their rituals made necessary a concentration on European soccer and on one specific German soccer team as paradigms with which intellectual readers in English-speaking countries are certainly not familiar. More precisely, it was my good friend Vittorio Klostermann who convinced me to engage in the experiment of trying to tempt a portion of the fans of Borussia Dortmund, the most popular but not unfailingly successful German team, a team that is famous for filling the largest stadium in continental Europe each and every weekend, to tempt Dortmund supporters with a book-long essay for the Klostermann publishing house that has earned its reputation by providing sophisticated editions of texts by philosophers of the stature of Ludwig Wittgenstein or

Martin Heidegger. The result of our joint experiment is unfortunately quite easy to summarize: while the German original of this book surprised us by receiving almost unanimously positive critical responses, the sales figures demonstrate that it never even began to appear on the radar of any group of the Dortmund fans.

In the sense of my main argument about stadium crowds, this may have been for the best. After all, the unique and for me fulfilling intensity of the stadium experience should not be permeated—and weakened—by philosophical thoughts. But if it may have become clear how my analysis of a very specific type of event can contribute to the understanding of presence behavior in general, both the concentration of my book on German soccer and the renewed discussions about the political role of crowds leave me with the obligation to provide some additional perspectives of illustration and reflection, above all for American readers. On the following pages I will therefore first formulate some opening ideas about a possible comparison and typology of stadium crowds in Germany and in the United States. I will then proceed and finish this introduction with some thoughts about the behavioral consequences of a present dominated by social distancing for the emergence and existence of mystical bodies.

Whenever I talk to European friends about the world of team sports in the United States, I feel the lack of a concept that would be the equivalent to the American “franchise.” Renowned professional clubs in England, Italy,

France, or Germany, like Real Madrid, Inter Milan, Olympique Lyon, and also Borussia Dortmund can of course be described as franchises, that is, as often intelligently run organizations which exploit the market of popular entertainment in the financial interest of players, coaches, employees, and in some cases even stockholders on different institutional levels. But this is not a perspective which their fans ever want to take into account when they imagine and think about their favorite teams. A market-driven move from one city to another, like that of the original Oakland Raiders to Las Vegas in the American National Football League, is out of the question for the fans of a *Verein* or of a British soccer club. Likewise, European fans still resist the idea of a majority “owner” although it has long become the economic reality in most professional soccer leagues—whereas the German Soccer Federation even formally excludes any individual participation over 50 percent of the operating capital. Soccer clubs or, to use the more obviously old-fashioned German word *Vereine* (Dortmund’s official name is Ballspiel Verein Borussia), are seen above all as entrenched in long-term local traditions that play a decisive role for the identification of their supporters. I, for once, am a fan of Borussia Dortmund because my mother was from that city and because my grandfather first took me to the local stadium when I was nine years old. At the same time I resent their rivals Bayern München, a gesture of resistance of somebody born in the provinces of Bavaria against a team from the capital of that state. Typically, such local genealogies do not only take into account

championships won and other moments of glory but also times of decadence and even tragedy, as they are dramatically accentuated by the risk of relegation to lower leagues, which is absent, for good economic reasons, from American professional sports. For the past half century, soccer in Europe and in South America has also cultivated a new dimension of absolute eminence by creating continental competitions for which only the most successful national clubs qualify each year. This additional layer of the season stands in stark contrast to American Major League Baseball, which celebrates its annual champion as the “World Series Champion” although only franchises from the United States participate.

While athletes with local backgrounds have long become the exception in international team sports, many soccer clubs still do care about having at least one star player who was born in their city, and they frequently choose him as their team captain. For clubs also try to stylize themselves as allegories of social identity. Since the late 19th century, the Ruhr area, where Dortmund lies, has been the proverbial German region of the coal and steel industries, and since the mid-1930s it has also acquired a reputation as the heartland of German soccer. First were a number of national championships won by Schalke 04, originally a neighborhood club founded in 1904 in Gelsenkirchen, less than fifteen kilometers away from Dortmund; then, since the 1950s, Borussia (also called Borussia 09) has risen to more permanent eminence. Both clubs, in their thorough social similarity, do not only cultivate a tense athletic rivalry but also a joint connotation

of being part of the proletarian tradition—even beyond the historical existence of that class. Borussia, like Manchester United in the English league, traces back its origin to the Catholic Worker movement and also emphasizes its social affinity to the more famous FC Liverpool in England, whereas Schalke has maintained, during their time of greatest athletic glory, a distance from the National Socialist government in Germany.

This also explains why the two franchises do their best, in an environment of high unemployment by contemporary German standards, to keep their stadiums open for fans in dire financial situations through a limited number of low-priced tickets. Almost as much as the teams, supporters from certain social groups can become part of specific stadium atmospheres and stadium appeal and thus attract affluent season ticket holders together with the national media. Blocks filled with “Ultras,” as the formerly proletarian spectators like to call themselves, do not only support the players with their collective voices and with their fight songs during the ninety minutes of each game—they also know that they are expected to be a source of occasional violence. As a third connotation of the crowd, after history and social identity, violence gives them an ambiguous status from the franchise perspective. On the one hand (and perhaps without any objective ground), the expectation of violence intensifies the projection of a proletarian presence as an exciting force that helps to fill the over 80,000 seats in the Dortmund stadium. On the other hand, this same expectation has begun to alienate customers ready to pay high fees for

American-style corporate boxes, and it ultimately conflicts with a new marketing style of soccer as relaxed family entertainment. Ultras react to this tense situation with ever more passionate claims of being the true matrix, if not the culturally authentic owners, of the stadium spectacle, and while the battle is far from being finished, Covid times with games in empty stadiums (*Geisterspiele*, “ghost games,” as the media refer to them in Germany) may mark the beginning of a new, post-Ultra era for soccer crowds. Ghost games could not only turn into more spiritual versions of the sports (they could become *Geistesspiele*, “games of the spirit,” as a now popular pun is suggesting), but they may also have an effect of “purifying” the stadium atmosphere.

The coming soccer age in continental Europe, in England, and finally also in South America will thus likely resemble the stadium environment in the professional leagues of the United States, with their homogeneous upper middle-class attendance whose behavior does not really correspond to what I try to conceptualize as the phenomenology of mystical bodies. From a typological point of view it may be more worthwhile to compare crowds in the European soccer heartlands to college sports crowds, especially in American football, which certainly constitute a national idiosyncrasy. There is no other country where amateur teams, teams that would not stand a chance to ever beat their professional counterparts, are able to attract millions of spectators both live and over the media. As a first impression, American college crowds and European soccer crowds indeed share an

atmosphere of high intensity that they both reliably produce through often locally specific choreographies and rituals, whereas spectators in professional league stadiums expect to get entertained and engaged exclusively by the rhythms of the games they are watching (increasingly on screens in their corporate boxes instead of direct eyesight)—by rhythms of the games, as they do not always and necessarily emerge by themselves.

Above all, college crowds and soccer crowds both assemble around the presence of respective core groups that set the pace of emotions and attract the attention of all other spectators: in this very sense, student sections in college sports are the structural equivalent of the soccer Ultras, although, probably as an effect and a symptom of college education (and of personal connections between college athletes and their fans), student sections hardly ever become violent. Whenever I watch the annual “Big Game” between the Berkeley California Bears and the Stanford Cardinal, allegedly the oldest derby in American college football, I do sense a (very age-inadequate) urge toward violence, at least toward violent language, an urge that must be rooted in my past as a soccer fan—and that has thus quite regularly provoked the disapproval not only of Berkeley fans in my proximity but even frowning among fellow Stanford supporters and among members of my family.

Now if the self-identification of soccer Ultras functions through lifelong feelings of local and social belonging, college fans are typically connected to their teams by memories of a specific segment in their existence—that

is, by memories of those early years of academic education that many Americans still tend to idealize. Different from the Ultras, thus at least my impression, the college type of stadium identification has a potential or a nostalgia of youthful lightness—and it is mobile in a specific way. Wherever in the United States Notre Dame, the most emblematic college football team, is playing, large numbers of fans assemble to watch “the Irish” play because many alums and even their families have carried an originally local feeling of belonging from South Bend, Indiana, the small town of Notre Dame University and its famous football stadium, to different places all over and even outside the country.

Across the American-Canadian border, and in spite of so many other cultural affinities, the specific atmosphere and appeal of college sports immediately cease to exist. In exchange, it is my impression that the excitement and support that surrounds local hockey teams in Canada comes closer to the European soccer atmosphere than any sports environment in the United States. At least the Montreal Canadiens (“the habs,” for French *habitants*, as they are called in Québec) and the Toronto Maple Leafs appear to be as far away from being moveable franchises as the great soccer teams from London and Milan, Madrid or Munich. Their identity is intertwined, in complex ways, with the tensions between different cultures in the colonial and postcolonial history of Canada. Above all and no doubt partly due to the physical intensity of the game that they are watching, hockey fans converge with soccer Ultras in a tendency toward violence.

The Richard Riot from 1955 that broke out after a violent altercation on the ice between the charismatic forward Maurice Richard and an opposing player has maintained the status of a legend in Montreal.

Crossing the Northern American border back in the opposite direction, baseball strikes me as a team sport whose world has been shaped by a specific form of attention and by a relationship between athletes and fans that contrasts with both the more corporate mood in professional football (increasingly also in basketball) and with the environment of college sports where baseball, not randomly, has never found an institutionally easy place. What above all stands out among baseball fans is their long-lasting, unconditional loyalty. Decades without any great success of the beloved teams will only strengthen their emotional attachment. Beside legendary clubs like the Boston Red Sox or the Chicago Cubs, the Hanshin Tigers from the Japanese professional baseball league, arguably the franchise with the most spectators per week in any sport worldwide, may be the most striking case of such a disproportion between the number of victories won and the number of faithful supporters—which proves that configurations between different sports and their specific atmospheres can well travel between blatantly different cultures. At the same time, however, Japanese baseball has adopted the crowd behavior of American college sports, which gives its stadiums a higher degree of intensity than one is used to from baseball in the United States. But not only their teams' long-term trajectory and "fate" count for typical baseball fans. Equally important is

the much shorter dimension of the past that statistics of individual and collective performance can make present. True baseball fans follow their teams in strategical reflections based on numeric evidence and thus embody a more quiet but particularly complex form of true passion.

The international typology of crowd behavior in stadiums that we have been presupposing over the previous pages has not yet been developed and written, at least in a truly systematic way. Not only could it serve as a compact metonymy for a comparison between historically and socially different cultures that still exist, in spite of their progressive erosion in an increasingly global world; at the same time, it might also provide a more differentiated matrix for the further development of a theory of mystical bodies. But this is intellectual work for the future and for following generations, largely independent of whether we will ever return to a world of presence rituals. A much more immediate concern regards the connection between the coronavirus present with its central imposition of “social distance” and the surprising political roles taken over by crowd agency. After all, a mandatory minimum distance of six feet between two persons makes the emergence of new mystical bodies almost impossible. For, as Hannah Arendt stated, the space between two persons is not only occupied by a joint focus of two minds on a shared object of attention. Once they start constituting such an “intentional object” together, as Edmund Husserl called it, a more physical “in between” that consists of bodily gestures in their mutual dependence inevitably

emerges. This is what I consider to be the elementary substance of crowds as mystical bodies.

In coronavirus times we sense—however vaguely—that we increasingly miss this in-between and we thus hope for a return to interactions without social distance. But we may also speculate that the coronavirus has only accelerated a long-term process of eliminating and bracketing the body from the social dimension of human existence and interaction, a process that has been going on since the emergence of early modern technology when our ancestors, for the first time, identified their existence exclusively with their mind or with their consciousness (as in Descartes's famous motto "I think, therefore I am"). The Enlightenment canonization of representation as the basic building block of parliamentary democracy made this tendency part of our everyday life. From the same angle, any further step in the reduction of the physical side of our existence, including the present measures of social distance, can appear as progress or even as a movement toward the fulfillment of human destiny.

The least aggressive version of a counterargument would have to say that as long as the life of our minds depends on human bodies as their matrix, any truly consequent elimination of bodies and of space as the dimension of their unfolding implies a high risk. More precisely, it implies the risk of an intensified desire for individual and collective body affirmation that our institutions are no longer prepared to handle. On both ends of the political spectrum today, and not only in the U.S., a large number of citizens do not feel politically represented

anymore, and this impression, together with a profound resentment against the established circles of politics and politicians, may less depend on specific issues or contexts than on a sense of elementary alienation from body and space. Those who protested against systemic racism rightfully felt they would not be heard without their collective physical presence “on the street” as a threat of or even a realization of violence. And nobody can deny that their intuition runs—at least structurally—parallel to the frustration of those fellow citizens who believe that their frustrations and dreams will only find resonance in a government under the direction of Donald Trump.

Instead of continuing to bilaterally condemn the “other” political side of crowd agency and of crowd violence, which will only further aggravate the division between the two halves of so many nations, we need to analyze the current crisis of political representation in order to come up with proposals for a reform of exactly this part in our societies. One way of imagining a different—and, if possible, more truly democratic—future may be through a movement of decentralization, together with the creation of new forms of immediate interaction between citizens and politicians. A more complex, more profound, and less prejudiced understanding of mystical bodies could turn out inspiring, if not indispensable for this necessary process of reflection and action. In other words: it is not only for intellectual reasons that a focus on crowds is as timely as it has ever been. It even possesses a political valence, although it was first triggered by the experience of stadium crowds and their rituals of intensity.

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1 EMPTY STADIUMS

It must indeed be an addiction, I suppose, not just something “like” an addiction. A secondary addiction perhaps. To drive by stadiums I do not yet know, without being able to stop and ask if there are tours or other possibilities for inspecting the interior: this literally pains me, particularly if they are stadiums where famous teams play. My wife, our two daughters, and even our two sports-obsessed sons have thus always been ready to invest a considerable amount of time in avoiding the stadiums on our path when we first enter a city. On the one hand, they really have my best interests at heart. On the other, they are eager to protect themselves from the pertinent, high-pitched lectures which I simply cannot hold back, although I know that no one wants to hear them.

So it is a stroke of luck for everyone involved when I happen upon a stadium alone—or when I can take the time to get to know it by myself. This is what happened in the late 90s when I arrived in Buenos Aires to give a

few lectures (to this day my primary reason for travel) and had reserved a long afternoon for the tourist attractions of “La Boca,” the former harbor district. La Boca has played a particular role in the history of tango, and the sometimes painted, sometimes weathered sheet metal façades of its houses conjure up the atmosphere of the late 19th century, a time when the city, under the onslaught of several waves of immigration, was on its way to becoming an international metropolis. At that time, many Europeans wanted to see in South America the continent, and in Argentina the country, the future. Above all, however, that part of Buenos Aires houses “La Bombonera,” the stadium of the Boca Juniors, which was inaugurated in 1940 and, together with River Plate, is the most successful and certainly most popular club in Argentinean soccer.

After the defending champion and gold medalist Uruguay, it was above all Argentina’s national team which put their sport on the path to an international fascination during the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam. And even then, the Boca Juniors played on the spot where La Bombonera stands today. The (of course unofficial) name of the stadium can best be translated into English as “chocolate box,” and refers to three particularly steep sets of bleachers (in particular those behind the two goals) that look down onto a comparatively narrow playing field that barely meets the minimal size requirements of FIFA. This peculiar impression of depth only serves to underscore a flat forth side, originally open but now reserved for luxury suites. Such a more or less

unplanned architecture, developed over the course of a century, also explains the acoustics that made La Bombonera famous, and notorious among visiting teams. More than the larger, architecturally more conventional Cancha Monumental from 1938, which belongs to Buenos Aires's upper-class club and Boca's rival River Plate, it is the space of La Bombonera that has witnessed the most colorful moments in the national history of soccer. Although Argentina won its first world championship against Holland in the "Monumental" in 1978, at the height of a merciless military dictatorship, it was in La Bombonera that Diego Armando Maradona became a star, and to this day he has a suite there. Beyond any comparison with Lionel Messi, Maradona has remained the most popular Argentinean player and is for me, together with Mané Garrincha from the Brazilian generation of 1958 and 1962, the ultimate embodiment of soccer charisma.

As fascinating as tango may be, I had of course come to La Boca because of the stadium, and so had preserved the highlight of the visit for the late afternoon. Dutifully, I purchased an entrance ticket for the Boca Juniors Museum—"dutifully," considering my not particularly secret conviction that the movements of a sport and the intensity of stadium-happenings can hardly be conveyed by still-leathery balls or washed-out jerseys, and not even, as interesting as they sometimes may be, by the typically black-and-white documentaries which are displayed there on multiple screens (because they lack all suspense about the game's end). The announcement that the last

stadium tour of the day had already begun did not disturb me in the slightest. On the contrary, I knew that a well-placed tip of a rather modest (but nevertheless generous) nature would suffice to grant me, and me alone, access to the three sets of bleachers.

And so it happened. I can't remember the exact amount of the *australes* (the Argentinian currency at the time), but the young man in navy-and-yellow overalls (the club colors) I gave them to immediately called me "Caballero" and activated all manner of courtesies which he was clearly not accustomed to using. La Bombonera overwhelmed me. The bleachers shot up so steeply that every step triggered the thrilling fear of stumbling, slipping, falling, while the last row above the goal furthest from the entrance offered a similarly steep view down to the field. It was here, really here, where the young Maradona had once played. Long history hung in the air above the stadium and became palpable as a sort of national weight, although I knew only a few names and dates. In my imagination the empty rows were filled with 50,000 fans and the sound of songs I had never heard.

But all at once the lights went out in the stadium, under the early evening sky. It never became clear to me whether this was due to one of the power outages that were common in Buenos Aires, or whether the employees of the Boca had simply forgotten me. I didn't dare climb over the now-closed metal lattice gate which separated the playing field and bleachers from the ticket offices, shops, and the museum. And why should I have? Given

the season, it wasn't going to get cold overnight. In any case, the dangers I could not see or did not know about did not occur to me back then. So I settled in to sit, or lie in a cramped sort of way, halfway up the bleachers behind the far goal, and abandoned my fantasy to the most childlike wishes and images. Deep forward passes for Diego Maradona; singing with thousands of Boca fans in the late 1940s, the era of Juan Domingo, Evita Perón, and the great Alfredo di Stefano, who, admittedly, played for River. I was not bored for a single second of that night, and I must have been woken at some point by the early light and the crowing of great black birds (so suggests my memory). Ten hours alone in an empty stadium had been rather a dream come true than a nightmare; it felt as if I had become part of a story, as if the night had been my baptism and so my entrance ticket into a community. Soon I saw from afar the same man in navy-and-yellow overalls opening the gate. He seemed neither surprised nor shocked at my appearance, and I gave him a few more *australes*. "Gracias, Caballero." It was not a problem to find a taxi which would take me back to the hotel in the city center, where breakfast was still being served.

By now I know that I am not alone in my craving for empty stadiums. As often as it is possible for someone who lives in California (so seldom more than once a year), I like to see Borussia Dortmund, the soccer team closest to my heart, playing in their famous stadium. The last few times I've been there, I've met up with my friend

Jochen. Jochen—who watches the match VERY differently than I do, more analytically, more competently, and who, by the way, is not a Dortmund fan. I entered the lounge with him immediately after the game's end, as the bearer of a ticket of a higher price category, and drank (what was for me) the second beer of the day (and year). Jochen then wanted to go back to the bleachers, something which was doable but not officially allowed. Simultaneously exhausted and excited, we both lit up another cigarette (also forbidden) and looked down at the playing field. An all but demonstrative emptiness now filled the stadium where just half an hour ago more than 80,000 people had been sitting or standing so as to fill the space completely, like a single mystic body. The lights were still shining with a dull warmth, but instead of the players' beautiful movements they illuminated three or four employees repairing the turf at the edge of the field.

No other stadium activates for me (and for many others) such feelings of intensity as the Dortmund stadium, perhaps because no other bleachers are so black with people even half an hour before the start of the game. I never see empty spaces in the SÜD, the long set of standing bleachers behind one of the goals. In the second half of my life, I must confess (and this is quite a heavy confession for me indeed)—in the second half of my life, the American football team from Stanford University, where I taught for twenty-nine years, has come to be even dearer to my heart than Borussia. Every now and then I had a Stanford player in a seminar; some of them I even

helped convince to study with and play for us. But although the beautiful, compact Stanford stadium with its more than 50,000 seats is sold out for every home game, some rows are always empty (season tickets are viewed by some alumni as donations). We fans are never loud enough, so much so that the fans of other teams have named our stadium “the library”—a fact which is very embarrassing to me.

For different reasons I was disappointed by a tour of the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium of Real Madrid, where in the mid-70s (a time when I was often in Spain) Günter Netzer and Vincente del Bosque played midfield—disappointed because the commentary of the tour guide, although interesting, and even the visit to the changing rooms, distracted from my imagination of the full stadium. By contrast, the Estadio Centenario of Montevideo has remained in my memory as being as thrilling as the Dortmund Stadium and La Bombonera. It opened in 1930, during the centennial celebrations of the country’s founding and exactly five days before the finale of the first world championships, won by Uruguay on July 30 in a 4:2 match against Argentina in front of 93,000 spectators. Here as well, I was overcome by the feeling that I had become part of a story I hardly knew, a story hidden in the walls that had adopted me.

But how can I explain—and not just describe—the fascination of empty stadiums? It’s noteworthy that the most famous stadiums are hardly ever to be found on the periphery of cities, as one would expect for practical

reasons. Instead, they have often been overtaken, quite literally, by the development of their cities; during the past few decades a tendency has even emerged to bring new stadiums right into the urban centers despite the high cost of real estate. There the unceasing animation of everyday life surrounds spaces which remain closed and silent except on game days. They have become a secular variation of the sacral space, set apart (this is the exact meaning of the Latin word *sacer*) and reserved for the relatively brief moments when rituals are consummated within them—such as and above all, in the cathedrals of the Middle Ages and the Catholic churches of today, during the production of “God’s real presence” in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

In spite of the affinity between stadiums and places of worship, I am in no way calling for a renewal of the all too ingenious (and hardly applicable) thesis that today’s spectator sports have become the functional equivalent of religion. Like the emptiness and silence of the cathedral, the emptiness of the stadium during the week marks a contrast to the intensity of its recurrent moments of ritual—here, the time of the game. But much more clearly than religious spaces, and in multiple ways, the stadium marks the border between the inside, as a place of the ritual happening, and the different layers of outer worlds. On a game day, we pass through the turnstile into the stadium and find our own assigned place; the teams come out to warm up on the empty field, another threshold—and leave again for their final preparations in the dressing

rooms; then they return together to the playing field, emphasize the imminent start of the game by singing (particularly in the United States), and repeat the double transgression of the boundary, back and forth, once more at the beginning and end of the halftime, before leaving the field at the end of the game for the last time.

During the game, however—and here lies the truly decisive contrast with religions and places of worship—the interior of the stadium becomes a compact stage, where a condensed form of earthly existence is played out; nothing could be less transcendental. After the start of the game (kick off, bully)—an expected part of the ritual yet incisive each time as an event—processes of decision, strategy, fate, and resonance take place, advancing upon us and retreating. Everything, all of life, including we ourselves, seems congregated in the stadium, and for a limited span the fullness of life and Being stands in irremovable opposition to the emptiness of the stadium during the week. In this doubleness the stadium makes present as an atmosphere what Martin Heidegger once called the “ultimate” philosophical question, a question impossible to be answered by men: the question, that is, why there is something and not nothing. To “make present” this question does not mean, of course, to “portray” or “represent” it. Games in a stadium are neither metaphors nor allegories for philosophical situations or problems—nothing would be more detrimental to the intensity of experience in the stadium than the very different intensity of philosophical reflection. But just as La

Bombonera allowed me to become for a night a part of stories whose names and dates I did not know, so a feeling of unconditional, ultimate relevance belongs to the spectators' concentration on the game, a feeling that resembles the grandeur distilled in the ultimate philosophical question.

And so a stadium event without spectators cannot exist, if only because this event, as a ritual of the fullness of life, depends on the contrast with the empty stadium—to whose special status belongs, in turn, the imagined abundance of spectators. In comparison, the noisy support of the players by the fans is a minor matter (and statistics show that the effectiveness of any so-called home advantage is decreasing today). Certainly, we can follow and analyze a game without spectators in the media (and even in the stadium), but then it is not, in its reality and its effect on the screen-spectator (both ontologically and existentially), what it can and should be as a ritual. And even under the premise of the specific potential of the stadium event, it is obvious that the masses, the thousands in the stadium, do not act like a vast collection of individuals whose conduct is the result of the average of many individual behaviors.

The stadium presents (but does not elucidate) the behavior of the masses as a phenomenon of difference which may be experienced quite regularly, but which perhaps has never been adequately explained. My reflections thus concern themselves with the terms, theses, and arguments necessary to understand a specific type of human

behavior—the behavior of the masses. This has been an interest of mine for a long time, not only because I am addicted to empty stadiums, but also because I have spent some of the best moments of my life as a part of their crowds—for example in the SÜD standing bleachers in Dortmund. I have never felt threatened there, as much as stadium employees and even friends have sought to remind me, in my ever-advancing years, that this cannot be my place anymore. On the other hand, however, I don't want to romanticize the stadium crowd with misty eyes, as it were. It is impossible to deny their affinity to acts of collective violence; perhaps this is the only form belonging to the behavior of the masses of which we can be empirically certain. But for the time being I abide by my hunch that the outbursts of violence which feature in any description of mass behavior are not the whole story.

As I said, this topic has been important to me for a long time, but it gained—particularly in Germany—a doubled actuality and priority in the weeks in which I wrote (and had long intended to write) this essay, during the spring of 2020. In the early awareness of the threat posed by the coronavirus, there was a first period of global transition where stadium events were replaced, primarily for financial reasons (so as to reap the profits of media transmission), by so-called *Geisterspiele* (“ghost games”)—that is, matches in a stadium without spectators. Soon afterwards sports events were fully suspended for several weeks, then resumed hesitantly and again without spectators, until the present moment, where small crowds are being admitted

back into the stadiums at 10 to 30 percent capacity. What we do not yet know is the possible long-term effects of this development. Has the groundwork been laid for a call to banish spectator sports permanently to empty stadiums in the post-coronavirus world? This may become an inevitable consequence of the experience which now confronts us, and will, if it really comes to it, change our relationship with spectator sports more fundamentally than we can now imagine.

In Germany's specific case, the first considerations about the use of *Geisterspiele* to counter the risk of infection happened at the same time as a new eruption of the heated confrontation between the franchises of the Soccer National League (the Bundesliga) on the one side and, on the other, the unconditionally loyal and tendentially violent fan groups who like to call themselves Ultras. In a series of concerted efforts the Ultras of various teams had, in a nearly literal sense of the word, targeted the sponsor of 1899 Hoffenheim, SAP software billionaire Dietmar Hopp. I write "in a nearly literal sense" because the fans of multiple stadiums had displayed posters that depicted Hopp's head behind a crosshair. The dignitaries of the German Soccer Federation, leading managers of the franchises, and even a large portion of the players reacted as if the fans had actually shot at Hopp—and demanded an apology, together with the immediate cessation of the campaign. One such apology was delivered, in a tit-for-tat, by the Schalke 04 Ultras,

who formally made their excuses to all prostitutes for having called Hopp a “whoreson bastard.”

But the confrontation is no longer really about Dietmar Hopp, and has not been for a long time. He is still a part of the dispute, but only as a distinct symbol, a symbolic target for antipathy—not as its true subject. Instead, what has emerged beyond the club rivalries is a feeling on the part of the Ultras, as strong as it is vague, that the presence and modes of behavior they bring to the stadiums are no longer welcome there. And nobody has a description of the presence and behavior of stadium crowds that is precise or careful enough for the resulting necessary discussion. Instead, the exclusive focus of managers and administrators on the crowds’ (and the Ultras’) potentiality for violence, together with the propensity of all masses to express themselves differently than in words, has made any productive debate impossible. In this book I am concerned with such a possibility of describing and also, in some partial way, of understanding.

2 STADIUM - MASSES

Those who stand in the Dortmund SÜD have left their individuality at home, and with it all the terminology used in everyday life to observe and control human behavior. That must be the reason why the name SÜD invokes in fans a familiar form of intensive, yet indescribable experience. Even the expression “stadium-masses” seems clumsy here, because it evokes an external perspective on a situation whose elementary premise consists of a being-within. We belong to a crowd with our bodies, and become in it a part of a relationship to other bodies—a relationship which does not have anything to do with common interests, or with solidarity, or with consensus, but only with bodies. In other words: the mass is a form of being-together, a form of human sociability of which the foundational element is the body.

Of course, the stadium-mass does not experience itself as a mass, but rather as something decentralized, a living interior for each individual body that at first needs no

form or contours. And in the best, or rather fullest case, this interior only provides as much space as each body needs. No one can move freely in a mass, nor in the standing bleachers, where the bodies almost touch each other without it being a matter of touch at all. No one speaks unnecessarily; everyone focuses exclusively on the playing field, open for whatever unexpected event might happen there. We are left alone with our concentration in a mass, yet we presume that our individual reaction to the events of the game will be accompanied by thousands of analogous reactions. For the sake of this predictable feeling of accompaniment in the stadium, we accept a view of the happenings of the game that is not comparable in complexity or exactitude to that provided by any media transmission (of course I am speaking here of my own enthusiastic decision to stand in the SÜD every once in a while—not of those who can only afford the tickets for the standing bleachers). As a mass, in the mass, we want to be as close as possible to the playing field, almost close enough to touch as it were, without ever being able to become one with it, also because this nearness to the playing field redoubles the feeling of interiority—of being simultaneously in the mass and in the stadium.

“Being in a crowd” thus means finding ourselves at the point of intersection between two relationships: the lateral relationship with the other bodies that accompany us, and the shared, quasi-transitive relationship to the playing field and its specific phenomena. Being in a

crowd means, secondly and always, to be a body, a body in relationship to other bodies but also within our own self-awareness. Being in a crowd means, finally, to be *inside* in two respects: firstly because we are surrounded by other bodies, and secondly because of our nearness to the playing field, in the innermost center of the stadium. Certainly we can be “in a crowd” even if we are not standing (as is increasingly standard today), as long as the transitive focus on the playing field remains unbroken and the lateral relationship to others does not turn into conversation with them: in a crowd, we can embrace each other after a goal, scream together, sing together, but we do not typically exchange knowledge or opinions.

For this reason the VIP lounge has no part in the experience of the masses or in the interiority of the stadium. There, the focus on the playing field is interrupted or even suspended by a variety of screens, snacks and drinks, and in particular by conversation, with the result that our lateral relationship to the spectators we encounter in the stadium is no longer a relationship between bodies as the foundation of experience, but rather one of individual everyday consciousness. In other words: it is precisely these VIP lounges and their distractions that rupture and abolish the special status of sociability in the stadium—a sociability of and conveyed by the body. Conversely, a whole array of affinities makes the stadium-masses comparable to the hundreds of thousands of people who come together, for example, to attend a mass led by the Pope.

But open-air religious gatherings do not usually possess an architectural structure that gives form to the crowd and thus tends to reduce the concrete physical space between its bodies—unless the service were to take place in a stadium. This seems increasingly to be the case for large religious events and for concerts of popular music as well. Meanwhile, the absolute quiescence of the bodies in audiences of classical music restores the lateral relationship between listeners to one of silent consciousness. This explains, perhaps, why it would never occur to us to refer to the audience of an opera or classical music concert as a “crowd” (let alone expect collective body movements to the beat of the music).

It is precisely these elementary aspects of existence within the stadium-crowd that I would now like to illustrate and differentiate, drawing from memories of my own experiences. I present this collection of observations as the cornerstone of this work’s attempt to understand and even, in part, to explain the behavior of the masses in the stadium.

Those almost overwhelmingly detailed memories we reserve for a few moments from our childhood allow me to bring to mind the soccer match I saw as a not-yet 10-year-old on February 12, 1958, in Dortmund’s Red Earth Arena (Kampfbahn Rote Erde). It was the final match in the first quarter of the second European National Soccer Champions Cup (today Champions League) between Borussia Dortmund (the German champion of 1956 and 1957) and

AC Milan (the Italian champion of 1957). Of course I could not recall *this* exact date—nor why I, a fourth grader in an elementary school in Würzburg, was allowed to spend a Wednesday (February 12, 1958) in Dortmund. I also cannot say anymore whether I watched the game with my 60-year-old grandfather, already suffering from the disease which would kill him in the autumn of the same year, or with my 25-year-old uncle—in any event, it must have been my grandfather who paid for the excellent tickets. What I have never forgotten, however, was that this was a match in the European Cup—though for many years I thought Borussia had played against Inter Milan (in their blue-and-black striped jerseys), my favorite team of the Italian A-series ever since I spent six months in Pavia in 1972 (during the era of the great midfielder Sandro Mazzola), and not against AC Milan in their red-and-black uniforms.

Above the mists of this mixture of vague remembrances and the sort of precise information one can now effortlessly access on the internet, there is a crystal clear layer of images that become present—literally—in my mind with the strength of unshakeable certainty whenever I approach the Rote Erde. That socialist urban development project from 1926, perfectly preserved as a historic memorial, now lies right next to the much larger stadium that has housed Borussia Dortmund since 1967. I am certain that I sat in the small, covered bleachers in the third row from the bottom, next to the corridor that the players used to enter the field and return to their

locker rooms. The stadium was, at least in my recollection, full to bursting on February 12, 1958, although the website of the European Soccer Association reports that the number of spectators was only 28,000—a number that does not correspond to the estimation of “around 40,000” my uncle provided as the answer to my question, still of pressing importance to me today, about the number of viewers.

For more than ninety minutes I was speechlessly, single-mindedly focused on the playing field, lit so weakly by an early version of the floodlight that the players wore reflective nylon jerseys in an attempt to make themselves more visible from afar. Above all, I can still feel the explosive euphoria that spread like wildfire to all of us at the last minute, as Borussia tied the match 1:1 (through an own goal by Bergamaschi, as one may read on the web). I do not remember the particular play nor any image of a scoring shoot, but I do recall the physical feeling of relief and the pride of success almost as clearly as if I had contributed to the goal myself. Salvation and fulfillment indeed—although the goal at the end should not have inspired anything other than a collective joy at its own inconsequential nature (because a 1:1 tie is never a good score for a home game). But it was at this very moment that I became a fan—a lifelong fan, as has probably become clear to the reader—of Borussia.

Immediately after Milan's own goal, the prominent English referee Arthur Edward Ellis (who during the previous world championship had refereed Hungary's 4:2

victory against Brazil, famous for its record number of intentional fouls) blew the whistle that signaled the end of the first quarter final—and the Dortmund players, like victorious heroes with heads held high in celebration, exited the field through the corridor next to my seat. Captain Adi Preißler with the thinning hair, the very Adi Preißler who would go down in the history of the club for his famous tautological maxim “Everything that matters happens on the turf”—Adi Preißler stood right next to me and raised his right arm and hand again and again as if in greeting. I did not understand the potential symbolic meaning of the gesture in a German context, and perhaps he did not either.

Irreversibly, in that stadium crowd under the floodlit night skies, I had become part of an event and its wave of euphoria. That Borussia would lose the return match 1:4 in Milan six weeks (not two, as today) later hardly mattered to me—and even the subsequent clarity about the potential historical meaning of Preißler’s gesture did not take away from the intensity that to this day overcomes me when I remember February 12, 1958. It was, and still is, a literally breathtaking joy that impressed itself on me inside that packed stadium—a joy that would not have been kindled without my admiring concentration on one player in particular: Adi Preißler.

Perhaps, when we are part of a crowd, it is the singular movements and gestures of individual athletes that most capture our attention—and it is possible that this is nearly independent from our hopes for the teams to

which they belong. Besides Adi Preißler's embarrassingly charismatic salute, I remember a snapshot of Uwe Seeler with perfect clarity, although I felt neither great hope nor any particular antipathy for his team, the Hamburger SV. It was during a final match in the German soccer championships in the Frankfurt Waldstadion, won by Eintracht Frankfurt 4:2 (it must have been a game in the winter of 1965). I watched from behind the goal as Uwe Seeler, unstoppably energetic, turned a cross pass in the air, waist-high—but the image of this perfect movement, executed at just the right moment, is bound up with a dull crack, like the sound of a cork leaving the neck of a bottle. "Achilles tendon," said my father, the surgeon, dryly, and assured me in my astonishment that one could hear a tendon rupture even from ten or more meters away. But his words, perhaps only figments of my imagination, do not belong to the image of that moment which has stuck with me for so many years: Uwe Seeler's wonderfully efficient movements, his blue-and-white socks—and the sudden crack, without any explanation.

So, too, did Orlando Pereira's cross passes and the voice of my friend Luiz mark the memories of my first game in Rio de Janeiro's Maracanã, the stadium built for the 1950 World Cup with room for 200,000 spectators. I was there on a muggy, gray Sunday afternoon in August 1977, when there were still seats for 150,000 fans in the dilapidated stadium but, for some unknown reason, all of the bathrooms were closed. Vasco de Gama, with the beautiful diagonally striped jerseys, was playing in one of Rio's

six classic derbies against Flamengo (Botafogo and Fluminense were the city's other two large clubs); Vasco's famous defense once again prevented all goals by the opposing team, as it did during the entire regional season—thanks in particular to Orlando, the first Brazilian offense-oriented defender. With cropped black hair, he was as fast as a sprinter and as tough as a middleweight boxer when he tackled. “Orlando,” whispered Luiz, almost praying, at every onslaught by his star—the “r” almost sounded like a soft German “ch.” His whisper became a shout toward the end of the game, when a cross pass by Orlando nearly scored the only goal of the day: “O-ch-lan-do!”

Even the packed stadiums where I, still in elementary school, watched the games of southern Germany's Premier League (Oberliga; the Bundesliga, or Federal League, came into existence in 1963)—even those spaces and their associated names are bound up invariably in my mind with clear images of the individual players: “Zabo” (Zerzabelshof, my memory suggests) from the 1st FC Nuremberg together with the fleet-footed Max Morlock, one of the German world champions of 1954; Ronhof from the Spielvereinigung (shortened, abstrusely, to SpVgg) of the nearby town Fürth together with Ertl Erhardt, who after 1954 climbed the ranks to become a tough stopper in the German national team; or the Stuttgart stadium with Robert Schlienz, the technically sophisticated offensive midfielder of the VfB who, in a world full of amputated war veterans, lost his left arm in an automobile accident.

The most striking stadium experiences, it would seem, only assume a concrete form in our memories when we feel that the crowd accompanies us in our concentration on the game. For this reason, I retained no images at all from the German Championship final on June 24, 1961, in Hanover, although I was one of the 82,000 spectators. I did not feel alone because Borussia, the favorite, lost the game 0:3 against the 1st FC Nuremberg—but rather because my father, who was sitting in the Dortmund section next to me, wanted “his Nurembergers” to win (he claimed he had played against Max Morlock himself as an adolescent) and was thus not wearing anything in the black and yellow colors of Dortmund. And so the hot afternoon began with the fatal intimation that I could not be part of the crowd because of the disruptive presence of my father. In the end, it was as if even the feelings of despondency about the defeat went right over my head: the day remained utterly banal and never assumed any pictorial form in my memory.

Another condition of the intensity of stadium-experiences has to do with their interiority and their fullness. On the “normal” Sundays—when I did not accompany my father in his Opel Rekord to the stadiums of Nuremberg, Fürth, Stuttgart, or neighboring Schweinfurt, which had a strong Premier League team with green jerseys—on those normal Sundays, I went alone to see the Amateur League players or the Würzburg Kickers. In those weeks I missed the experience in the large stadium crowd so much that I spent my time constructing tiny dream-stadiums out of

Legos, stadiums for the hometown team where my father had allegedly played a few times. But what prevented the local soccer field from being a stadium? It wasn't only the number of spectators, which was always between 3,000 and 8,000 in those days without televisions and without the privileges of the wealthy. Rather, it was the fact (as embarrassing to me as if I myself were responsible for it) that the playing field was made of dusty red dirt and not of green turf. I was also disturbed by the reality that I was simply too small to see the game from the one side of the field, the so-called Commander's Hill, where fifteen or more rows of fans would stand one behind the other (among them my English teacher Emil Reuter with the vigorously Franconian accent). Instead, I had to watch from the few scanty lines of spectators surrounding the other three sides of the field—far too few to conjure up a feeling of interiority. I also knew one of the players, the left defender Schorsch Schüle, to be a good friend of my father's, something which made it impossible to maintain the sense of impersonal attention that binds a real stadium crowd to the playing field. We are present in a different way at amateur games or types of sports that never fill a stadium: like a relative or a former player, we make specialized comments, almost a part of the competition yet without the lateral neutrality, the interiority of the crowd, or the paradoxically small distance between ourselves and the players on the field.

If someone should ask what my most sublime stadium-experience was, looking back on the sixty-some years of

my life where I have, more or less, attended one live sports event per week (and if at all possible, in a crowd of spectators)—my answer would not be a soccer game at all, but rather the rugby match between Australia and New Zealand that marked the opening of the Olympic Stadium (Stadium Australia) for the games in Sydney in 2000. My wife and I had arrived a few days beforehand from Japan, together with three of our four children, and immediately after the check-in at the hotel I asked the concierge, as always, whether any sports events were going to take place during the time of our visit. As if in a fairy tale, we followed his lead to the owner of a bar near the hotel who gave us five tickets for the first rugby match of our lives. Once more we found ourselves standing behind the goal posts, with 110,000 other fans—a good fifth of whom had come from New Zealand to cheer on their All Blacks (or Kiwis). It was clear, however, that the dominant team in this most intensive of national rivalries in the Southern Hemisphere was the incumbent world champion Australia (the Wallabies).

The game began ferociously. After barely five minutes, New Zealand was in the lead 24:0, with three attempts and only a single strike from Australia. Our attention was immediately caught by the 25-year-old Jonah Lomu, on his way at that time to becoming the first real international star of his sport. Over six feet tall and more than 260 pounds, his head shaved except for a narrow strip of black hair: he was a remarkable sprinter (100 meters in 10.8 seconds) and shattered the resistance of the defenders on the

left side again and again—until he was able, increasingly, to ignore them. But first, the Wallabies struck back. They had taken the lead by the beginning of the second half—when it had become clear to us that to follow a sport on such a sublime level did not require a solid understanding of its rules. The lead changed once more; still, just minutes before the end Australia was winning by three points. But then an uncanny final pass put Lomu in motion again. He came down the field toward us, just inches from the sideline, slipped past the defenders, and placed the ball, gently and almost as if in passing, on the try-line.

The Kiwis had won, and we were swept up by the elation which flooded the stadium and captured all of the spectators in a unified mass. Not a single player wanted to leave the field. No one in the stands knew what to do with their joy at the sublime prowess of the athletes, at the successful improbability of their plays and the oscillating drama in the clash between the two teams. On the way back to the city center we imagined that it was rugby's specific spirit, a peculiarly generous fairness of the sport itself, which had seen the Australian fans through the admittedly painful defeat of their Wallabies. The truth was revealed by the gigantic headline of the newspaper that was shoved under our door in the hotel the next morning: "Greatest Rugby Test Ever Played!" And so indeed has the game of July 18, 2000, been canonized ever since.

The explosive euphoria that culminated in bodily movement, limited in its range of motion in the stadium and without particular direction: this is certainly connected to violence, to the energy produced by bodies in the struggle against other bodies. Such a phenomenon is, indeed, what produces the violence that we associate with the masses, and in particular with the crowds one finds in the stadium. Only seldom, however, is this violence understood as an expression of protest or disappointment: on the contrary, euphoric masses are likely even more “dangerous” than defeated ones. On the other hand, it is perhaps difficult to detach such violence from that expansive feeling of joy which presupposes the silent, lateral accompaniment by other bodies and at the same time seems to rely on the trigger-function of experience through emblematic gestures or bodily movements. We want to be as close as possible to such gestures and movements; they should be close enough to touch. But at the same time they are detached from us and never belong to the space of the crowd, just as the elegant shot and the dull crack from Uwe Seeler’s ankle, in all their immediacy, remain as eternally distant from us as if they were on a stage.

The breathtaking forms of performance belonging to athletes inspired Pindar’s hymns at the dawn of the European lyric tradition, as well as countless documents of enthusiasm ever since—but on the whole there are far fewer reports of this sort of euphoria than one might

expect. A discourse about the joy and unique possibilities inherent to the masses never gained momentum; indeed, for the past century such moments have been subject to an explicit intellectual taboo. Only the Christian theological tradition had coined the term *mystic body*, nearly forgotten today, to refer to a sociability mediated by bodies—a term that came to my mind during another stadium opening match (can it be a mere coincidence that I remember so many of them?). This one was in Maracanã, after its renovation and expansion to hold slightly less than 80,000 seats, before the 2014 soccer world championships in Brazil. The inaugural game was a rather incidental pairing: Flamengo, the irresistible favorite from Rio, versus Cruzeiro, the pride (as it were) of Minas Gerais, that historically central state without coastal access which has its capital in Belo (Flamengo won 2:0).

I had paid for three VIP seats because my wife and our daughter Laura Teresa wanted to come—but the signs in the stadium directed us to the section of the “Falange do Flamengo,” that entirely, and rightly so, infamous group of Ultras whose name had (although perhaps only for me) obvious fascist connotations (*Falange*). There was no room and certainly no freedom of movement between the concentrated bodies, the fireworks and smoke, the songs with their elementary obscenity stemming from variations of one particular Portuguese verb, unpronounceable in this as in all other languages. “I’ll go exchange the tickets right away,” I said apologetically, and thought of the many hundreds of *reais* it would take me

to do so. But Ricky and Laura did not react at all. They were swaying to the rhythm of the Flamengo-Ultras and singing, in the famously soft accent of Rio, words which they thankfully, as they spoke no Portuguese, did not understand. “They spoke in tongues,” as it is written in the very same Christian tradition that had also invented the concept of mystical bodies.

3 THE CONTEMPT FOR THE MASSES

Masses hardly want to express themselves: we remain speechless in a mass, and we do not have a suitable vocabulary to describe what makes them so compelling. This is one side of the problem this topic implies; the other has to do with an intellectual discourse of contempt for the masses that is inevitably kickstarted every time we want to describe them “neutrally,” much less sympathetically. The history of this discourse of contempt begins in the middle classes of 19th-century Europe, with the institutionalization and enthronement of an obligatory understanding of the individual as a person who wants to differentiate himself from other persons. Until the end of his literary career in 1888, Friedrich Nietzsche regularly attacked the “herd instinct” of his contemporaries—and this is just one of the traces of an incubating contempt for the masses, hardly incisive simply because of its ubiquity. As a discourse, however, such a contempt has a datable beginning and an astonishingly stable, even disturbingly

compulsive structure—a structure that intellectual speculations about the masses have never really been able to escape.

This structure came into being with the massive European resonance of the 1895 book *Psychologie des Foules* by Gustave Le Bon, a French author who, distanced from the academic world, made a name for himself primarily through his engagement with popular scientific questions (in 1903 he was even nominated for the newly established Nobel Prize in physics). Le Bon wrote about the masses with thoroughly polemical—and also cautionary—intentions, stating critically in his introduction that they must be thought of as “the last remaining sovereign” in the political world. For this reason, he continued, humankind stood “at the beginning of an era of the masses.” All “civilizations” were created by compact “intellectual aristocracies,” while the function and calling of the masses generally consisted of “destruction”—and in particular, at the end of the 19th century, of the “barbaric” destruction of traditional culture, which had lost “all strength of moral power.” “Like microbes,” the masses completed the “dissolution of weak or already-dead bodies.”

After this strong beginning and its drastic, centrifugal metaphors, Le Bon’s text culminates in a thesis that he—and others like him—would cling to tightly. Every mass assembly, he asserted, causes certain ever-present “transformations” in individuals. This statement allowed him in his reflections to treat not the particular phenomenology of the behavior of the masses, but rather a lesser

version of individuality—the type of the *Massenmensch*, as it soon began to be called. In the masses, Le Bon proposed, the subconscious of the individual comes to the fore: that is, the dimension where human beings allegedly seldom differ from each other. This is supposed to result, firstly, in the suppression and reduction of precisely the sort of the intelligence that emphasizes the difference between individuals. Secondly, he continued, one feels strong inside of a crowd and is thus encouraged to follow “irresponsible impulses.” Thirdly, Le Bon’s masses have a propensity to adopt “as if through infection” the behaviors of other crowd members (that is, to copy them) and are marked, fourthly, by “their willingness to be hypnotized”—that is, their desire to be controlled by an outside force (“the masses want a god”).

Le Bon’s description still seems plausible, not least because most of us encounter some version of it during a normal process of socialization—and therefore consider it to be common knowledge, along with the friendly and relativizing observation that the masses are not only characterized by their “tendency towards crime” but also by their “potential for heroism.” Le Bon’s biography and ideological development make clear his motivations behind this most central position. In 1871 at the age of 30, he witnessed the events surrounding the Paris Commune in reaction to the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War—that is, the second revolutionary moment (after 1848) which did not stem entirely from bourgeois energies. In the years following, he became traumatized by

the fear that the masses would gain political agency and thereby become the absolute legitimators of violence. Chronologically, the most immediate experience behind Le Bon's book was the 1889 rise of General George Boulanger, a figure who was immensely popular with the masses and who incarnated the late dream of revenge against Prussian Germany. Boulanger may have squandered away his chance at dictatorial power, but he left behind in the educated, republican classes across Europe (the term *intellectual* did not exist yet) a lingering fear of mass-movements and their demands. This, particularly in France, had clearly contributed to the historic sustainability of the Third Republic as an institutional structure of state normality.

The length and import of Le Bon's grip on the horizons of thinking about the masses becomes clear with the publication of the still-esteemed tract *Group Psychology* (*Massenpsychologie* in German) and *the Analysis of the Ego* by the great Sigmund Freud in 1921. Freud not only dedicated an entire chapter to the summary of Le Bon's thesis—he also took over his argumentative architecture without any significant changes, varying it only with his own version of his predecessor's terminology (which, in the end, did enable him to further develop motives from the earlier theories). Like Le Bon, Freud started with the premise that “the individual in the crowd” is changed fundamentally, because the crowd grants him a feeling of “power and security.” In place of Le Bon's central positioning of the concept of the “unconscious,” Freud used

the more specific term “drives” (*die Triebe*)—“infection” became “mutual induction,” and, naturally, when speaking of masses’ desire for a “hypnotic leader” or “god,” Freud’s “narcissistic libido” came into play. The masses were “impulsive, mutable, excitable,” wrote Freud, and they were “led almost entirely by the subconscious.” But Le Bon had also gotten that far—and our greatest regret is that his book may have prevented Freud’s singularly powerful theory-imagination from speculating about a hypothetically “genuine” behavior of the masses as a whole, instead only about that of “the individual” within a mass.

The most internationally renowned book in Le Bon’s tradition, however, is José Ortega y Gasset’s *La Rebelión de la Masas*, condensed from a series of essays published in the newspaper *El Sol* and still emanating the rather optimistic spirit of the Western bourgeoisie of the mid-1920s—although its publication coincided with the collapse of the global economy in 1929. Like Le Bon and Freud before him, Ortega began with the supposition that the individual (and indeed, “the individual from every social class”) changed under the influence and as part of a mass, because the masses imparted feelings of “wellbeing and self-satisfaction” that motivated the individual to “make demands.” With a noteworthy talent for succinct and innovative phrasing, Ortega went far beyond Le Bon and Freud to develop an enduringly applicable typological repertoire for describing the *Massenmensch*, who acts like both “a spoiled child” (*niño mimado*) and “a

self-satisfied know-it-all" (*señorito satisfecho*) who denies the existence of certain institutions and values while secretly relying on them. In this attitude, Ortega wanted to locate the social substance of fascism, which was then on the rise in most European societies. More universally, the *Massenmensch* was characterized by an asymmetry between "the insistence on his rights" and "the forgetfulness of his duties"—a fact which made him the antithesis of the self-motivated bourgeois elite.

It is precisely this historic reference to international fascist tendencies and their ecstatic escalation in Germany's national socialism that, after 1945, solidified the contempt for the masses which was already a matter of course among intellectuals in 1930. This was not only because its conceptual basis continued to find resonance: fascism and national socialism did indeed find in "the staging of national masses" their central ritual. At the beginning of the movement, Mussolini had taken over the Italian government with the 1922 "March of the Blackshirts" on Rome; this was repeated in Hitler's seizure of power on January 30, 1933, with an SA parade through Berlin, reached its monumental pinnacle in the Nuremberg Rallies (it was not only Hitler's followers who succumbed to their aesthetic), and finally came to a potentially suicidal conclusion in the frenetic "Yes!" emitted by the crowd in front of the Sport Palast in February 1943 in answer to Joseph Goebbels question: "Do you want total war?" Ever since, it has been impossible for those who wish to preserve their claim to some form of

erudition to speak positively of the masses when referring to social structures and movements.

At the same time there seems to be a need to repeat and illustrate Le Bon's thesis, as demonstrated above all by the reception history of the 1960 book *Crowds and Power* (*Masse und Macht*) by Elias Canetti, winner of the Nobel Prize in 1981. Very recently, indeed, a prominent public intellectual requested that this book be "read anew every ten years"—and today we find it frequently described as a masterpiece. And yet, *Crowds and Power* hardly goes any further than Le Bon, Freud, or Ortega y Gasset, despite Canetti's elegant prose and his impressive historical knowledge (when we ignore the few positive remarks about the masses which could not fail to appear in a book of this scope).

Canetti begins with the thesis that the individual loses his "fear of touch" in the masses and, once this boundary has been crossed, tends to "unburden himself" in the "craving for destruction." From there, he loses himself in a true furor of typologies (for example: "heart-masses," "flight-masses," "prohibition-masses," "reversal-masses," "fixed masses"), something we also find in Le Bon and Freud though to a lesser extent. He indulges in opulent cultural-anthropological illustrations that warn unflaggingly against the tendencies of masses, leading to an analysis of "the act of command" (biographically speaking, we can certainly trace all this back to Canetti's own horror during the 1920s at his susceptibility to the temptations offered by the masses). At the same time, some of

the materials from non-Western cultures he discussed, and above all the especially productive passages about the “rhythm” of the crowd, could have prompted him to rise above the normalized contempt for the masses. But this potential step was ultimately opposed by Canetti’s penchant, which grew clearer by the page, for viewing himself as a cultivated individual—something which has made his book even today a favorite amongst us intellectuals.

In my retrospective reading I find the strongest exception to Le Bon’s mode of discourse in an essay by Siegfried Kracauer from 1927 entitled “The Ornament of the Masses.” Kracauer first turned his attention to the Tiller Girls, a British dance group revolving around the perfect choreographic coordination of multiple bodies—but “full stadiums” appear again and again in the periphery of his observations. Only a crowd, he wrote, and not individuals (and here even Kracauer adopts without quoting it directly, Le Bon’s premise about the emergence of the subconscious)—only a crowd seems able to embody an abstract ornament. For several pages the evaluation of the relevant phenomena remains ambivalent; the “degree of reality” of a mass ornament is higher, we read, than in those “artistic productions that cultivate traditionally noble feelings within obsolete forms.” In the end, however, Kracauer too locates a “mythological cult” of rationality and “a masquerade” of reason in the abstractness of ornament. In so doing, he structurally anticipated the argument used by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, from their Californian exile during

World War II, in developing their theory of “culture industry” throughout a central chapter of their famous book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Apparently with the intention of adhering to the Marxist tradition and its positive references to the crowd, Horkheimer and Adorno concentrated their criticism on an ostensibly American-capitalist form of cultural production adapted to a “consumption” that targets the masses—not on the behavior of the masses themselves. In the consumption of cultural products, they wrote, the masses become alienated from their own legitimate interests and needs—and thereby fall victim to the “culture industry.” Horkheimer and Adorno never succeeded in finding an answer to the resulting inherent question: What, then, would a form of culture and cultural reception *not* belonging to the educated bourgeoisie—that is, a politically legitimate “mass culture”—look like? Whoever has dealt with their writings knows that, for all their engagement on behalf of the world’s underprivileged, Horkheimer and Adorno would have found the idea that twelve-tone music could contribute to class struggle less absurd than a philosophically serious reflection about the behavior of the crowd in a stadium.

Nevertheless, they deviated in form from Le Bon’s tradition of speaking about the masses, inventing an alternative discourse, though one similarly ambitious in its dialogical focus. In contrast, Peter Sloterdijk returned, in a 1999 lecture at the Munich Academy entitled “The Contempt of the Masses” that revealed his enthusiasm

for Canetti, to an understanding which positioned the intellectual individual as a counterpoint to the masses—though not without elegantly self-ironizing undertones (it is from Sloterdijk that I take the title for this chapter of my reflections). With an eye on the new millennium, he posed a question that is still of decisive importance today: What is the difference between a mass gathering of individuals present in actuality and a media-constructed crowd of, for instance, television viewers? “The mass experiences itself today only in its smallest components, the individuals, who give themselves over as elementary particles of an invisible commonality precisely to those programs in which their mass character and commonality is presupposed.” Sloterdijk proposed an answer to his own question, one plausible in particular for the European Union’s welfare society (and in a certain sense anticipated by René Girard’s mimetic theory): in light of the equality principle omnipresent in a media-constructed crowd, there can no longer be any societally acceptable differences between individuals, much less vertical hierarchies: “Everyone looks up to everyone else,” he wrote. “Where there was identity shall now be indifference.”

Sloterdijk did not react to this conclusion with a cheaply magnanimous plan for an entirely new society, but rather with the sympathetic title of a book by Emil Cioran: *Exercices d’admiration*. Could such admiration exercises include praise for bodily present masses? I rather doubt it. And yet, Sloterdijk paid due respect to the central implication and consequence of the philosophy of

his colleague Richard Rorty, who, at long last, had suspended the intellectual's—allegedly superior—impulse to withdraw from the masses, and in so doing broke definitively with Le Bon's tradition. Sloterdijk spoke—not without admiration, he stressed—of an “upright step into banality,” conceding to Rorty that this step was consummated with a Nietzschean serenity that destroyed all illusions. Rorty's terminological and political break with the contempt for the masses, however, was not succeeded by a concept of sociability mediated through bodies. No task would have seemed more foreign to Rorty, I imagine, than such an analysis of mass behavior.

Gunter Gebauer and Sven Rucker proposed yet another way out of Le Bon's theory of the masses, with a particular eye to stadiums and sport events: they maintained the classic question about the influence of the masses on the comportment of individuals while reversing certain tendencies in their answer. “Instead of weakening or even dissolving the Ego,” they wrote, “the collective emotions summoned by the experience of the arena increase the subject's belief in his own Ego and in the collectivity of the entire community.” I do sympathize with Gebauer and Rucker's position (including his references to certain ambivalences of the “subject's belief in his own Ego”)—but I remain skeptical, as this reversal of Le Bon's approach does not take into account the bodily energy that flows through crowds, that is to say, their affinity for violence.

In general, one should expect that an examination of the idea that mass-behavior is mediated through bodies

and often adjacent to violence would occupy a central position in sociological thought. But the literature does not fulfill this expectation, or only very poorly. Indeed, whoever is generous (or tolerant) enough to concern themselves with the relevant contributions will be so shocked by their quality as to only quote them anonymously. Some attempts to empirically observe mass-behavior as actions taking place “in an assembly of bodies” go no further than banal statements (“masses tend to self-dissolution along the time-axis”) or the listing of subjective impressions without terminological coherence (“centrifugal,” “tending towards expansion,” “decentralized”). In particular, the description of masses’ violent tendencies as the “rational use” of the bodily means of “enforcing interests” is absurd, however much it stems from the good-hearted desire to take the masses seriously in the political arena.

Judith Butler’s *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* belongs to an entirely different philosophic-conceptual realm. More clearly than Gebauer and Rücker, she analyzed the specific behavioral possibilities of a group constituted by bodies in actual co-presence. Here, however, this analysis is only concerned with political potentialities and functions—in convergence with Hannah Arendt, whose position offers her a sense of orientation. Butler then admitted that the performance of a group of bodies cannot always be identified as politically “left” in its articulation. Above all, however, she emphasized the thesis—a convincing one, I think—that the

physical presence of bodies in space culminates politically in the right to have rights in the first place, something which cannot be justified in abstraction.

Such a claim—that is, that one possesses “a right to have rights” on the basis of physical presence—could indeed become relevant in the aforementioned context of the tension between the German Soccer League and the Ultras. Indeed, it would even favor the Ultras—provided we view the stadium as a public space and not as the possession of a club or enterprise. But in the end, neither the Ultras nor the audience of a rock concert or Catholic mass are concerned primarily with political goals, despite the fact that political criteria play a role in the evaluation or enforcement of their actions.

Here we can see an affinity with the concept of the “Dionysian” as developed by Nietzsche, the great critic of the human “herd instinct,” in his book *The Birth of Tragedy*—where the word *masses* appears in a thoroughly positive light. In my reference to Nietzsche, I am not at all concerned with any intellectual ennoblement of mass behavior, but rather with the distance between their behavior and any sort of intentionality or function-oriented strategy, and in particular with a detachment from the hereditary compulsion to hold the masses in contempt (a contempt born from the perspective of an individuality always constituted by intentionality).

Dionysian moments, conversely, do not bring downgraded individuals into play, but rather break with individuality entirely. According to Nietzsche, when we take

seriously the “blissful rapture” which arises at the “collapse of the *principium individuationis* from the innermost depths of human beings, and indeed of nature herself, then we have a glimpse into the essence of the Dionysian, which is presented to us most closely through the analogy of intoxication. It is either through the influence of a narcotic drink or through the powerful drawing-near of spring that Dionysian excitement awakens. As its power increases, the subjective fades into complete forgetfulness of self.” Historically speaking, Nietzsche locates the origin of the Dionysian spirit and its potential ability to break the bonds of individuality in the structure and effects of the tragic choir: “Dionysian excitement is capable of communicating this artistic gift to an entire multitude, so that they see themselves surrounded by such a horde of ghosts with which they know they are internally one. The process of the tragic chorus is the original dramatic phenomenon: to see oneself transformed before one’s eyes and to act as if one really had entered another body, another character.”

With these quotations, I am of course not intending to imply that Nietzsche’s concept of the Dionysian captures the energy of a full stadium in the 21st century. Nietzsche developed his perspectives and terminology from out of a philologically competent examination of the tragedies of 5th-century Athens, and in so doing opened up new possibilities for historical understanding. Instead of inquiring, in an embarrassingly ingenious way, where we might locate the equivalent of the tragic choir in an American

football game, we should work toward developing a specific terminology for the rituals of presence in our own time. Nietzsche's thoughts serve as an inspiration along the way, in the same way the theological tradition that speaks of the Christian church as a "mystic body" has informed our thinking about contemporary stadium-masses without replacing them. Certainly, the full stadiums of today (or rather, from the perspective of early 2020, of yesterday and hopefully also of tomorrow) have their predecessors in the history of sports. But what makes them extraordinary today is their status as rituals of presence in an environment that has almost systematically done away with such things. This is a process that began in early modernity and was accelerated enormously with the birth of modern technology—and has found its apex in 2020 with the universal command to "social distance."

4 MASSES OF THE PAST

The tiresome terminologies and prejudices that, for a good century, have stood in the way of any intellectually productive discussion of the masses were originally a means of resistance against the bourgeois revolution and its disruption of a presumed tranquil future. But such mass events, emblematic since the early 19th century, also remind us of scenes from the Judeo-Christian tradition as well as from classical antiquity—scenes whose diversity spurs on our imagination above and beyond all faded polemics. I will highlight several such moments in this chapter, in the hope, above all, of gaining an increasingly nuanced understanding based on my observations of and questions about the phenomenology of the masses.

In multiple prominent passages of the Torah and the Gospels, we encounter the People of Israel presented as both an agent and a crowd, under remarkably similar circumstances. After the Israelites realized that Moses, who brought them out of exile in Egypt, had lingered too

long in conversation with their God on Mount Sinai, they called upon his brother Aaron “to make gods who will go before them” (Exodus 32). From the “gold of their women, sons, and daughters,” Aaron fashioned the renowned “golden calf,” which the Israelites worshipped the following day in an orgy on its own altar. Seeing this, the one true God commanded Moses to “go down from the mountain, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have done wrong; they have been quick to turn from the way I commanded them to go—I have seen these people, how stiff-necked they are.”

As soon as Moses saw the idol and the “dance” of the Israelites, “his anger burned and he destroyed the calf, scattered the pieces on the water, and made the Israelites drink it.” Aaron, whom he accused of leading the people astray from their God, made excuses: “You know how prone these people are to evil.” But “the people” were still “running wild,” and Moses commanded that each of them “kill his brother, his friend, and his neighbor”—“and about three thousand of the people died on that day.” Then Moses ascended the mountain once more to beg God’s forgiveness for the sins of his people. God lamented once again the obstinacy of the Israelites and pronounced that he would keep his distance from them for the time being, because he would have to “kill them all” if he came too close.

We know this motif all too well, beginning in the discourse of the late 19th century: the masses desire an intimate and utterly hypnotizing leader, and then act in

accordance with him. It is only in the presence of Moses that the people are able to remain faithful to the distant God who chose and saved them. Under the direction of a leader who conforms to the will of the masses, by contrast, events come to pass which even God himself did not anticipate: the masses become “wild,” they “dance,” they pray to a golden calf. And they do this in full agreement with Aaron, to whom they have turned—almost as if in a political demonstration—as a weak leader. God describes the behavior of the people as “stiff-necked” and seems to suggest that disobedience is normal for a crowd in the absence of a strong leader. And then, the Israelites enact without hesitation the violent command issued by their strong leader, Moses, decimating themselves in an act of reciprocal murder as penance for their sins.

The Israelites, now referred to as Jews by the New Testament, act in a similarly obstinate way in one of the few episodes found in all four of the Gospels, in a passage which has become the earliest example of Christian anti-Semitism. This is, of course, the story of the thrice-repeated question issued by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate to a gathering of “Jews” (Mark 15 speaks, indeed, of a “mass” manipulated by the high priests): Did they really want Jesus to be crucified, even though Pilate had deemed him innocent after his trial? To satisfy the mass’s desire for violence, Pilate offered them an alternative: he would crucify Barabbas, another prisoner, in Jesus’s place. But after the crowd had screamed “Crucify him!” three times, Pilate succumbed to their will—a governor more

interested in diffusing the situation, also fueled by the ongoing celebration of Passover, than in acting justly.

Another crowd had gathered around Jesus before an earlier Passover festival, a “great mass” of “some five thousand” people near the Sea of Galilee (John 6). There they experienced a miracle: from five loaves of bread and two fishes Jesus fed the entire multitude, and at the end of the day the disciples filled “twelve baskets with everything that was left.” On that day, the people began to say, “Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world.” We find a final miracle caused by a crowd—or more precisely, by two crowds—in Acts 2: “Now there were staying in Jerusalem during Pentecost God-fearing Jews from every nation under the heavens.” As this “crowd” heard the wind and saw the tongues of fire which came to rest on the heads of the Apostles, who were “sitting together in one room,” they ran to them “and each one heard their own language being spoken. Amazed, they asked, ‘Aren’t all those who are speaking Galileans? And how does it happen that each of us hears them in our native language?’” We trace the phrase “speaking in tongues” back to this passage; the expression refers to the rare, though certainly not always mythological or manipulated, circumstances whereby people (must they be in a group?) discover their ability to speak in languages they do not know.

The masses thus have an ambivalent status, as we have seen, even in the Judeo-Christian religious writings. In a crowd without a strong leader, the Israelites forget and

even betray their God, but it is also in a crowd that they create the conditions for the Son of the New Testament to perform what is surely the most theologically important miracle, the feeding of the five thousand. Above all, however, the masses conjure up a latency of events: there is the potential for outbreaks of violence, or the creation and destruction of idols, but also for the feeding of a multitude and speaking in tongues. And the masses will embody this ambiguous potentiality, beginning with the bourgeois revolutions, as new, and increasingly decisive, agents of history.

In the first of those, the so-called Glorious Revolution in England toward the end of 1688, the masses hardly played a role on the political stage, populated as it was by those aristocratic protagonists fighting to replace the Catholic monarchy with a Protestant one. After William of Orange landed in England with his troops at the end of the year, the history books occasionally mention “popular uprisings” or “mob” action against Catholic officials and in support of the future rulers. The new royal couple’s concession to the parliament, however, although it made that revolution “bourgeois,” has not yet been brought into connection with such mass-interventions.

An examination of the Boston Tea Party, probably the most famous event of the American Revolution, reveals just how much the status of social mass movements had shifted over the following eight and a half decades, especially from the perspective of politics. The price of the tea, inflated by taxes imposed by the East

India Company, became a central impulse behind protests on the East Coast against the colonies' lack of representation in the British political system. Between 5,000 and 7,000 of Boston's 16,000 inhabitants attended the famous demonstration at the harbor on November, 29, 1773, but less than 100 individuals participated in the actual "tea party," where chests of tea were thrown from multiple ships into the water. As an independent agent, the crowd did not take part in this particularly focused provocation, but the staging of their connection to the action by means of a preceding general protest certainly must have increased the moral aura and political effectiveness of the Tea Party itself.

The complexity, legitimacy, and political efficacy of the dynamic embodied by the masses increased with the events of July 14, 1789, in Paris—events whose singular meaning for the history of the West cannot be overestimated. Under the blazing summer sun of that month, the intensifying confrontation between the States-General in Versailles (with their demands for stronger political participation) and the monarchy (which had repeatedly acted in an inept way) culminated in an atmosphere of latent tension even in the capital. Along the way, a still-unknown individual came up with the idea of arming the inhabitants of Paris in order to put pressure on the government and so support the States-General. Like a summons without linguistic form, that suggestion seems to have triggered some 80,000 people to flock to the Les Invalides, where the commanders released the approximately 30,000

weapons stored there without posing resistance of any kind. Decisive for the events of July 14, however, was the fact that the masses did not cease moving after their first strategic goal, Les Invalides, was reached.

Their next aim was, indeed, the Bastille, multiple kilometers away: a stronghold from the depths of the Middle Ages that had become a symbol of all the oppression the people had experienced—despite the fact that it held only seven prisoners at the time, men without any political or individual meaning. On the morning of July 14, a delegation of Parisian electors had already visited the Bastille to negotiate a transfer of power with the commanders; lacking any explicit instructions, the masses may have simply followed these delegations. Over the course of the afternoon, however, shots were fired, and the Bastille was besieged, overtaken, and ultimately surrendered. Some 100 attackers died before the event came to a frenetically celebrated end around 5 p.m., with the capitulation of the commander.

The immediate effect of this focused and yet anonymous mass-movement as an event in space was tremendous, felt by Paris, Versailles, and soon all of Europe—and not in spite of, but precisely because it could not be connected to any quantifiable political successes (as was the case with the Boston Tea Party). On July 14, 1789, the mass's latent potential action and violence had taken on real form, all the more visible and effective because this dynamic had firstly and simply appeared as violence in space—and not as some political strategy or identifiable

effect. This happening of mass violence, as horrifying as it was sublime, was graced by the new aura of legitimacy that had come to be associated with the then still-vague phrase “the people” over the course of the 18th century. As a crowd without a visible or invisible leader, “the people” rose to the position of the—potential—agent of history, or more precisely: they embodied both an infinite hope and an infinite threat, and did not really take on the role of a real agent at all. Since July 14, 1789, it is in exactly the ambivalence of this double potential that the power of the masses lies.

During those days, the masses were made up of individuals belonging to every possible class and social strata. This social diversity, however, merely increased the weight of their legitimacy. July 14, still today considered to be the iconic paradigm of self-declared “revolutionary action,” has forever changed the sense of the words “the masses,” without the intellectuals—and in particular the intellectuals of the future “left”—ever having really trusted their own popular movements. On the last page of his “Introduction to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right” from 1843, for instance, Karl Marx identified “the proletariat” as arising “primarily out of the human masses produced by the dissolution of the middle class.” He had no confidence, as he wrote, in the ability of the proletariat (as a class and in a crowd) to advocate independently for their own interests with any sort of success: “As philosophy finds its *material* weapon in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *spiritual* weapon

in philosophy. And once the lightning of thought has squarely struck the ingenuous soil of the people, the emancipation of the *Germans* into *men* will be accomplished. The *head* of this emancipation is *philosophy*, its *heart* is the *proletariat*.”

Marx's realistic grasp of the difference between focused, active individuals on the one hand and the masses as an agent of history on the other did not prevent the intellectuals, in their role as ideologues, from portraying “the proletariat” or “the masses” as rationally acting agents. The most flagrant example of this praxis is surely their description of the Storming of the Winter Palace in Saint Petersburg on October, 26, 1917, as the central event of the Soviet revolution; this canonization takes for granted a structural correspondence between that autumn day in 1917 and the storming of the Bastille in 1789. In actuality, however, the former event resembles more the conquest of Les Invalides: for, in order to prevent the shedding of blood, the militarily superior Bolsheviks allowed the some 3,000 soldiers quartered there to leave the palace by nightfall. The descriptor “Storming of the Winter Palace” was invented in 1920 for the third anniversary of the revolution, which was celebrated in a mass spectacle featuring 2,500 actors and 100,000 spectators; the Soviet government would release the footage of the event as a historical documentary of the events of 1917, thus canonizing an event that had never happened in reality.

Over the past century the masses have belonged to the standard repertoire of both “left”- and “right”-wing

depictions of events of radical political discontinuity. We have already mentioned the ways in which large-scale marches allowed fascists and national socialists to seize power. Today's mass-movements seem to be less orderly than the fascist marches or communist May Day Parades from the decades between the World Wars—and have thus gained once more an affinity with the events of 1789. Turning to Germany, it was the mass protests during official celebrations in the communist state during partition that heralded the country's reunification. The so-called fall of the Berlin Wall stemmed from a premature television announcement made by a government representative from East Germany, who stated that the passage between East and West Berlin would be allowed "immediately, without delay." After only a few minutes, hundreds of thousands of Berliners had appeared on both sides of the wall, and through sheer physical presence enforced a command which had not yet been officially given. More recently, the Arab Spring of 2010 in Tunisia and the 2014 Maidan Revolution in the Ukraine posed aggressive resistance to their respective established governments. In both cases, digital coordination brought together an unprecedented number of individuals in a movement of astonishing flexibility, one which the police and even the military could hardly bring under control. But as was the case for both the German reunification and the events of 1789, those unstaged mass movements were soon brought back under strategic control and were absorbed by the negotiations between political represen-

tatives. The masses as political agents, it would seem, were never able to achieve much more than this.

Crowds, however, have yet another, perhaps more essential function, one which is only rarely manipulated by outside forces: the function of spectatorship, as it has featured for millennia in the history of sports. It is a well-known fact of history that the Circus Maximus in Rome, a structure we can still see today in all of its impressive expansiveness, was at some point able to seat 250,000 spectators. In order to understand how central the experience of being-in-a-crowd was for the lives of many Romans, we must only consider the fact that its three tiers filled some sixty times per year in a city with around a million inhabitants. Most popular were the series of chariot races (*missa*), each about nine minutes long and performed back-to-back over the course of several hours. These races were particularly cherished because they were financed not by the price of tickets but by rich sponsors—and also because lower-class Romans could usually make a living by working only four or five hours a day, and thus had plenty of time for entertainment.

Archaeological findings at the location of the Circus Maximus verify the existence of chariot races as large-scale sporting events since the 5th century BCE. The expansive literature on the topic has made clear the similarities between ancient Roman spectacles—and in particular chariot racing—and professional sports as they have developed since 1900. Successful charioteers, with their teams of four horses, were usually citizens from the

provinces or former slaves who had purchased their own freedom; their earnings most likely topped those of star athletes today. In Rome, high-ranking officials could count on an annual salary of 100,000 to 300,000 sesterces, while a legionary earned about 1,200—Gaius Appuleius, however, a charioteer from what is now Portugal, revealed to all posterity on his tombstone that he had received more than 36,000,000 sesterces over the course of some 1,500 victories.

Rome's four racing stables (*factiones*), differentiated by the colors white, blue, red, and green, were powerful corporations that coordinated their best horses and jockeys in a sort of team strategy, like the Formula One stables of today. They negotiated with their sponsors in tones not unlike those of the contemporary conversations between sport clubs and media representatives. Eccentric behavior was the norm for fans of the *factiones* from all walks of life and reached its zenith in the rumor that the emperor Caligula, a devotee of the green stables, was seriously considering making a stallion by the name of Incitatus consul. The reactions of prominent authors and thinkers to such phenomena were accordingly critical (or full of resentment), spanning from figures such as Cicero, who was spared from the excitement about Caligula, to Seneca and the early church father Tertullian.

Any description of ancient spectators as a crowd, however, must be accompanied by an awareness of structural differences between the stadium-masses of today and

their ancient predecessors. Neither Greek nor Roman sporting events, for instance, managed to separate themselves from an omnipresent religious framework, however marginal it may have been for the actual spectators. Racing days began with processions (*pompae circenses*) where images of deities, sponsors, and athletes approached the stadium in accordance with strict rules. The loges of high-ranking statesmen during the Republic and later the Empire featured altars where opening rituals were carried out. Stadium events were always moments of elation unimaginable without the presence and contribution of transcendent powers. The interests of the sponsors, too, cannot be explained through any direct comparison to contemporary phenomena: they did not need to win over the masses as voters or as potential buyers. The fact that the masses reacted with irritation whenever Caesar seemed to be occupied with business from his seat in the loges, however, reveals the importance of that united sense of elation—an elation that transcended social status as a celebration of life in Rome. It was in the common interests of those in power to cultivate and protect this collective feeling and its rituals. Only when the capital of the empire moved to Constantinople in the early 4th century did the *factiones*, and with them the ritual of chariot racing as a whole, retreat to a less central position dominated by petty political rivalries and intrigues.

The roots of religiosity ran even deeper in the gladiator games, which slowly developed over the course of the 1st

century CE into an alternative to racing and then into a parallel spectacle—as demonstrated by the expansion of the Colosseum to include space for 70,000 spectators. As deadly confrontations between two combatants, the gladiator fights may be traced back to ceremonies dedicated to the memory of the deceased and their continued presence. Most likely, it was precisely the potential proximity of death in those theatrical confrontations that created the conditions for a communal celebration of life amongst the spectators. More so than in chariot racing, furthermore, this spectacle was constantly subject to modification and transformation. The athletic and existential asymmetry of the gladiators varied in accordance with the weapons and equipment used, and the hunting of exotic animals as well the restaging of famous battles on land and sea quickly gained in popularity alongside the usual combat forms.

Historically speaking, the most astonishing fact is that Western stadium-masses more or less vanished with the collapse of the Roman Empire, after a heyday of more than 1,000 years (the historicity of the romantic conception of medieval jousting tournaments is doubtful). No one can really explain why the history of stadium crowds picks up again for the first time in the late 18th century, when professional boxing matches in London attracted over 10,000 spectators—just as the Christian rituals began to lose their place at the center of social life and the future itself seemed as open and provisional as a

sporting match. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, and for a long time in competition with aristocratic or, later, programmatically socialist amateur sports, various ball games played by professional athletes slowly began to fill the stadiums once more. Team sports, now firmly at the center of the public's attention, only became attractive after the mid-19th century.

The transmission of sporting events on television began, hesitantly, with the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. By the third quarter of the 20th century, these transmissions had reached a global audience and achieved such a high level of reproductive perfection that they were soon superior to any live experience in a stadium—and thus, as one may imagine, elicited the fearful prognosis that stadium events, and with them the phenomenon of the stadium-crowd, would soon be a thing of the past (sport fans of my generation will remember this all too well). But the opposite happened. In spite of painfully high ticket prices, even for those in the swiftly disappearing standing bleachers, and in spite of the existence of high-quality video coverage, today's stadiums are more packed than ever before. Where games are sold out or too far away, live public transmissions have become another form of mass experience, even for a large percentage of spectators who have little interest in the actual content they are viewing.

The stadium itself has thus become a central space—perhaps the only space—where rituals of presence take

place, in a world where daily life increasingly relies on electronically mediated presence accompanied by bodily absence. It is precisely this digital environment of total communication that increases the intensity of the stadium and its crowds, together with an aura of sublimity removed from all exercise of bourgeois taste. Such an atmosphere only reaches the VIP lounges in diluted form, organized as they are around distraction, but even they belong to the stadiums—masses are realized through gestures of inclusion and confrontation rather than through gestures of exclusion. The crowd is most fully actualized not in politics, but in the stadium.

Is it here that we find the “stiff-necked” obstinacy of the masses without a strong leader, as the God of the Torah twice accused his people from Mount Sinai? In any case, the masses did not implode or disappear when society, economy, and technology no longer seemed to have space for them, literally and metaphorically. It is for this reason that every stadium-happening of today may be seen as a new and urgent insistence, one neither truly political nor truly legal, on the crowd’s own right to exist. This is, perhaps, what the Ultras were not able to say.

In a stadium, it is possible to see how masses reach their fulfillment. Only there can I be alone in my body, thanks to the lateral presence of thousands of other bodies; only the stadium gives a common form to bodies assembled in real presence, a form that limits their movements and at the same time triggers them; only in the stadium is the aloneness shared by thousands directed at

an event as a shared object of attention, as takes place in music, in the liturgy of a religion, or, above all, in the competition between athletes. And only there, in the focused attention of the crowd, can sequences of events transform the latency of the masses into explosive action, welcome or not, violent or friendly, invariably unpredictable—yet always an event, and often Dionysian.

5 IN THE CROWD—LATERALLY:

SWARMS, MIRROR NEURONS, PRIMATES

The words that we—the aging spectators in the better seats, but also the Ultras of Dortmund, Manchester, or Buenos Aires—could use to explain why stadium crowds are so irresistibly attractive do not yet exist, let alone a coherent theory of stadium experience. Out of a sheer sense of self-respect, I cannot entertain approaches which take for granted that being part of a crowd downgrades my intellectual and affective potential as an individual, even if I do not think that such views imply an unbearably narrow-minded conception of individuality as the only form of existence worth living.

Equally unsuitable are the various conventional modes of speaking that view the masses as if they were agents, subjects of action, or even individuals. This is particularly inadequate because crowds have never really wanted to take nor have succeeded in enacting decisive steps toward political change, no more so than they resemble neurotic individuals, as Freud suggested. And certainly they do

not act in “stiff-necked” or submissive ways toward their potential leaders, as if they had an individual or structural overarching personality. The concept of mass behavior implies that general typologies are possible, as in the case of a nation, a social group, or biological genus; however, there is no serious evidence that any of this really exists. We can attempt to explain how a large group of people came into being in a specific case (for instance, on July 14, 1789), changed over time, and eventually dispersed: as always, however, this is a matter of particular processes that do not lead to a general theory of mass behavior.

How might a vocabulary or theory look that would allow us fans and stadium romantics to describe our fascination for the masses? To put it differently, as I have done before: What is the phenomenon at the heart of this essay, and what is the concern of the Ultras when they make their intense noise? Most of us feel “different” when we are part of a crowd. We do not feel threatened or existentially reduced, but rather sense that we are a part of a collective embodiment of an existential possibility not usually present, and therefore unexpected. For example, we might feel lonely or focused in a particular way, ecstatic, elated, or ready for violence. Being part of a crowd sets free potentialities which are normally dormant—and it is these potentialities that I would like to highlight here.

The differences between the lateral, transitive, and vertical dimensions of being in a crowd have already appeared occasionally in this book; they will be even

more fundamental in this and the following chapter. By *lateral*, I mean the experience of the relationship between my body and other bodies in a crowd, or to phrase it differently: the dimension that makes me part of a crowd. *Transitive* describes the specific attention of the masses directed at a central object, that is, the “content” of the stadium. This transitive dimension can elicit a *vertical* dynamic, that is: the activation of those special affective potentialities that we do not experience anywhere in our mundane existence except when we are in a crowd. In this chapter I will concentrate on the lateral relationship between bodies and then, in the following chapter, on the vertically uplifting moments in a crowd. The transitive direction of this experience, finally, will bring together these two modes of description.

On this topic, I cannot bring myself to conjure up even one of those rhapsodically coherent theories which so delighted the humanists of the late 20th century. I will therefore proceed eclectically in my reflection to the lateral dimension, borrowing terms and theses from three different schools of thought: from recent observations about swarms; from the discovery of the so-called mirror neurons and from the resulting discussion about their implications for the understanding of social relationships; and finally research about primates. With this eclectic collection of perspectives, a specific element of human (self-) experience comes into view—an element whose subject matter remains, on the one hand, entirely inaccessible to our understanding, as it belongs to the

domain of both the psychoanalytical subconscious and purely physiological processes; on the other hand, it hardly ever becomes a clearly delineated (or “intentional,” as it is called in phenomenological philosophy) object of experience. Rather, it seems that there is an underlying feeling of a lateral relationship between bodies in a crowd, constantly present in the layers of behavior we share with other living beings but hardly notice—and which can be transformed through active reflection into complexes of “intentional objects.”

Over the past decades, swarm behavior has had a particular appeal for thinkers and researchers, because swarms, as collective structures consisting of living beings, show an intelligence of movement and self-preservation that cannot be located either in their individual units or in their mere accumulation. This is also and especially true for the behavior of masses of human beings who have been gathered by means of electronic devices for the purpose of political protest or in situations of asymmetric warfare (this explains why military academies have quickly become central to such reflections and investigations). In any event, all living creatures not permanently affixed to a single spot—that is, anything capable of movement, including bacteria and most plants—assemble themselves in swarms, categorically or occasionally. We can thus define swarms as the convergence of two opposing principles regarding the relation between their constituents, a phenomenon we have already observed in crowds. The members of a swarm are firstly attracted by the concentration of

a great number of similar beings (and particularly by what is at their center, as in the case of the queen in a swarm of bees, or by their movements, as in the case of birds). Secondly, these constituents tend to avoid reciprocal collisions, despite their convergence and increasing closeness. That is, we would like to stand or sit in a packed stadium without being spoken to or jostled by those around us.

The closer we get to the center of the swarm or the quicker its movements, the more likely such collisions become, a challenge that the swarm must master through stigmergy. This term refers to a series of similar movements executed by the members of a swarm in order to avoid collision, movements which are altered slightly in reaction to the movements of the surrounding constituents in order to eliminate a paradoxical and catastrophic effect—that is, a total collision through the accumulation of identical attempts to avoid collision. Stigmergy is visually familiar to us in particular from the edges and curves of swarms of birds that compress and then unfold themselves again and again. Together and in sequence, the individual movements produce a complexity (and often a beauty) of motion, i.e. of a collective self-preservation that also helps each constituent preserve energy: this seems to reveal a high degree of intelligence, but an intelligence that does not rely on a center or a hierarchical structure of communicated commands. This intelligence is fragmented, yet functions as a vector of communal movement.

When examining a possible affinity between human masses and swarms, however, this intelligence is less fasci-

nating to me than the aspect of movement (not least because fragmented swarm intelligence cannot be experienced by an individual human consciousness within a crowd or a swarm). The attraction of a crowd and the avoidance of collision within it—the two lateral principles that constitute a swarm—we know from the stadium. As masses and swarms seem to be similar phenomena, and as motionless swarms do not exist, the unavoidable movements of a crowd (as swarm) in the limited space of the stadium cannot really unfold themselves—and so remain latent, held back. This latency of pent-up movement is often felt by those within a crowd as a psycho-physical vibration, a sense of unrest, an intransitive drive (as, for example, in the case of the restlessness shared by the players after “the greatest rugby match of all times”): this is a latency that is perceived as the energy of shared movements without the possibility of spatial articulation (into parallel, coordinated rhythmic gestures, for instance, or into song), and a latency that has the potential for violence, in the mutual resistance and aggression between bodies in space. There is no energy of the masses without a risk of violence. Or to put it more neutrally: behind the latency of masses is, most likely, the latency of a pent-up swarm movement.

Like swarm behavior, mirror neurons have become a favorite topic amongst intellectuals since the end of the 20th century. Here, however, the starting point is not a new perspective regarding our interest in human behavior—as in the case of swarms—but rather a concrete biological discovery applicable to the brains of all primates.

During the 1990s, neuroscientists from the University of Parma found neurons in primates that were not only activated by certain movements and behaviors of the body to whom those neurons belonged, but also by the observation of similar movements and behaviors in other primates (and, as we now know, in other species as well). Mirror neurons are the neurons capable of such a double reaction, and the effect of their activation—an effect which leads to increased empathy or affinity between primates, including humans—is called embodied simulation.

It is relevant to the study of masses, and in particular stadium-masses, to emphasize that perceived actions only activate the mirror neurons when they take place in both physical and in particular existential proximity to the perceiving body—when they are “ready-to-hand,” as Vittorio Gallese, one of the discoverers of mirror neurons with a particular background in philosophy, has stated. Similarly, experiments have made it clear that media-transmitted images, and in particular close-up shots, have the same effect as movements happening in real life. In principle, however, the mechanism behind mirror neurons only works in relation to movements and forms of behavior within individual species of primates. The sound of dogs barking, for sure, does not activate the mirror neurons of human beings. There seems to be, however, a certain plasticity in this rule: for instance, I strongly believe that images of flying birds do activate these neurons in humans, producing feelings of a physical affinity

to flying (empathy may be a too-ambitious descriptor of this particular phenomenon).

Turning to the lateral dimension of proximity: to be “ready-to-hand” in a crowd means that I do not need to actively copy the movements of the bodies next to, in front of, and behind me if I want to act in a similar fashion. An inclination, perhaps even the first impulse toward an analog behavior comes into being simply through the mere awareness of the motions of other bodies—and it is conceivable that such an impulse is joined to and strengthened by the latency of a crowd as a swarm. Above all we are familiar with the effects of mirror neurons in the—transitive—gaze of the crowd, directed at the playing field. Our thigh muscles activate when we watch a forward score a goal; our arms when we see the goalie stretch out his hands to block the ball. And here the consideration of a possible connection between the action triggered by the mirror neurons and the pent-up latency of movement in a crowd seems particularly suggestive. Perhaps it is a convergence between the two impulses that explains the impression of a “transitive” attention directed at the movements on the field; and perhaps this is the reason I can still remember Adi Preißler’s strange gesture from February 1958 and Uwe Seeler’s shot in the Frankfurt Waldstadion with such overwhelming immediacy.

In contrast to swarm behavior and mirror neurons, the study of primates has long served as a backdrop to developing conceptualizations of human self-reference during

the course of the entire 20th century. But this area of research also witnessed a productive shift in interests: the behavior of primates is no longer studied today in order to measure the alleged separation between human and primate forms of performance and intelligence. Instead, the goal is the description of the contrasts and fundamental differences between the two. This means that affinities with other species (for instance, affinities between human beings and other primates) are no longer understood as evolutionary remainders, but rather as special potentialities worthy of our understanding.

In describing the behavior of stadium crowds, it is particularly insightful to observe how primates assemble at the start of a swarm-like movement, a moment that is marked by a swelling choir of their cries. At first, the swarm thus does not seem to be perfectly synonymous or congruent with its movements; rather, it is marked primarily by its capability for latency toward a collective movement—and to this latency belongs vocal behavior (the rising cries of the primates, or the singing in the stadium). During this period of latency, several “initiators” normally move in different directions away from the group of primates, glancing repeatedly over their shoulders to check if their movements have triggered similar movements in the crowd. In the case of swarms of birds gathered on the ground or in trees, in contrast, there is no central “decision” and certainly no “leader.” Rather, their collective movement tends in whichever direction

contains the most and the most quickly accelerating cases of mimicked behavior.

It is fundamental that these lateral relationships should not awaken any associations with the concept of empathy. Without exception, it is only those who are visibly and audibly part of a crowd or a swarm who indeed belong to that mass or swarm. Primates who lose contact with their group are never brought back into the fold. The ability to “walk in another’s shoes” does not seem to exist in this context: there are only copied behaviors. We cannot even say for certain whether primates experience something like a sense of sorrow at the death of a member of their group. The body of the other is primarily an entity within a swarm that can be perceived and copied: there is no evidence of something like communal movement, nor of a general sociability. What we in human beings call the rational (and therefore central) control system of a mass movement must be for primates, if it exists at all, a poor compensation for the concreteness of replicable physical presence.

A central condition of the lateral dimension of our existence in a stadium crowd is the fact that the bodies in a full stadium are often forced to move closer and closer together. This triggers mimicable and swarm-like behaviors that would not exist under the normal conditions of distance—whether naturally, technologically, or hygienically motivated—that govern human existence. The implications of these behaviors, and consequently of the

lateral dimension of the masses, can be examined from three perspectives.

Firstly, I am part of the crowd with my consciousness and am thus capable of being alone in it: my consciousness recognizes that I am not bound to the other bodies in the stadium by empathy, as would be the case in a conversation or with relatives at a party. I do not imagine myself in their situation, I do not identify with them—and I certainly do not see in the opposing fans' relationship to their team a functional equivalent of my relationship to my own team. In principle, I am alone and isolated in my consciousness, because I do not experience the other bodies as possessing their own consciousness, but rather as concrete objects that differ from me (in contrast to the VIP lounge, in the bleachers I do not speak to the fan who is sitting or standing next to me, neither before the game nor during halftime). This is not at all a defect of the stadium experience, or a downgrading of my own individuality. Rather, the bodies accompanying me form a concrete backdrop to my transitive and isolated concentration on the events of the playing field. Nothing distracts me as long as the game lasts, and there is no possible alternative to this concentration and its objects.

Secondly, thanks to mirror neurons we are bound to the other bodies in a crowd, in our physical nearness and existential being-at-hand, through a mutual mimicry that does not require conscious reflection in order to function. This must be the reason humans are sometimes able to speak in tongues. When the Dortmund SÜD

sings “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” they are not really relating to the content of a lyric text that speaks, among other things, about a lark—instead, they are producing a purely physical duplicate of a sequence of sounds in a certain rhythm, as becomes possible under the conditions of lateral presence. In contrast to the events of the biblical Acts of the Apostles, the instances of “speaking in tongues” within radical Christian sects in contemporary America do not reveal any theological or mythological meaning to their listeners, but rather emerge as a series of sounds and rhythms that may sound like an idiosyncratic language “inspired by the Spirit,” but which are ultimately vocal sequences without content. It is through the performance of such sequences that the participants, in the solitude of their concentration (that is, laterally) become part of a collective body. At the same time, the relationship of mimicry between the different bodies does not necessarily have to be one-to-one: particularly on the edge of the crowd or swarm, each duplication may be slightly different than the one before it, perhaps along the lines of varied improvisation in jazz.

Thirdly, if it is indeed the case that the crowd, as swarm, possesses a directionality of movement which accumulates and becomes latent within the confines of the stadium, then we can explain why the experience of the stadium in its vertical dimension is so permeated and elevated by a special energy—that is, by the congestion of this pent-up movement. Such energy has always discharged itself into the focused movements of collective bodies—movements

which mostly fade away into nothingness, but which can also become violent in a collision with other bodies. We underestimate the danger of such collisions if we view them as solely an expression of protest or frustration, because their brutality is a function of an energy without psychic content. This was true, for example, of the “baseless” violence of the fans of Germany’s national team who, after a tied preliminary game during the 1998 world championships in the French city of Lens, ran down the policeman Daniel Nivel and almost trampled him to death.

The suggestion that mass events in stadiums should be forbidden because of a potential for violence that can never fully be eliminated or controlled is an understandable one—and has gained momentum for other good reasons during the coronavirus pandemic, above all because of the risk of infection. Yet at the same time, the latent movement and pent-up energy of the crowd contains the potential for elation, without which the stadium-event as a ritual of presence might implode. It is possible that we need such rituals more today than ever before—rituals that rise above the lateral energy of mimicry, the transitive focus on the playing field, and, vertically, above all, the pent-up energy to transcend everyday existence.

The question remains: What is the relationship between the architectural form of the stadium and the degree of energy felt within it? This is material for another, longer book—not least because the construction of stadiums has become an experimental playing field for prominent

architects. However, it goes without saying that the most beautiful stadiums are not always the most intense, in particular when they leave too much space for the spectators and the athletes. And yet, the reverse is also not always true: narrowness may seem to be a better prerequisite for stadium-intensity than expansiveness, but this alone does not guarantee anything. The energy of the crowd seems to be most intense wherever we find a stadium, to quote Elias Canetti's book positively for the first time, "black with the masses." This is perhaps most likely in the asymmetrical stadiums that did not come into existence in a single moment of construction—in La Bombonera, Anfield Road, Dortmund. But there is no general rule even here, although certainly, it always adds to the excitement if the architecture of a stadium is charged with the history of its place.

6 IN THE CROWD—VERTICALLY:
MYSTICAL BODIES, INTENSITY,
TRANSFIGURATION

I have already mentioned the fact that the Christian theological tradition—in contrast to sociology and cultural studies—has at its disposal a concept of human communities as mediated through bodies and not through shared knowledge or interests. The Catholic Church conceives of itself as “Christ’s mystical body,” an expression preceded in the 4th- and early 5th-century writings of the Church father Augustine by the more elementary formula “the Body of Christ.” The adjective *mystical* initially referred to the status of Jesus, incarnate Son of a triune God, as something which could not be argued by logic. Later, it was medieval scholasticism that first began to associate the concept of the mystical with the Body of Christ as a metaphor for the church. In this context, the *inexplicable* dimension of the word’s meaning continued to prevail over its association with the direct experience of God’s presence.

But why did the Christians, in contrast to the monotheistic believers in Judaism or Islam, come to view their relationships with each other as being bodily mediated? This understanding must first of all have had to do with their derivation of community from the only explicitly *incarnate* member of the divine Trinity (that is, from Christ rather than from God the Father or the Holy Spirit). To this day Christian believers want to keep their community alive by means of the sacrament of the Eucharist, its central ritual—that is, to the Catholics, by theophagy, through eating the body of Christ and drinking His blood (in this understanding of the tradition, the bread and wine are not symbols, but incorporate the real presence of Christ's flesh and blood).

The most recent development of the mystical body of Christ motif, and a central one for the present self-conception of the Catholic Church, is manifested in the June 29, 1943, encyclical from the pontificate of Pius XII. In a global political situation that split 350 million Catholics between two belligerent coalitions, the nonsecular, now doubly mystical, unity of believers was of particular import to the Vatican and Pope Pius. It was for this reason, perhaps, that the encyclical text opened by quoting the scene of the tongues of fire above the heads of the Apostles during the first Pentecost; that is, with the founding event of the Christian church.

The text then describes the community of the church, in all its institutional dimensions, through the suitably

conventional metaphor of the body. Three aspects of this metaphor seem to be particularly relevant here—and I will present them as three specific interpretations of the adjective *mystical*. Firstly, the individual institutions of the church and above all its individual believers—in contrast to the organs of a biological body—maintain their independence and even their own personality. In sports, this state of affairs may reveal an affinity to the particular “solitude” of the spectator in the stadium, a solitude against the lateral backdrop formed by the bodies of the other spectators who accompany him. (Do we thus become “other people” during our time in the stadium?) Secondly, the encyclical emphasizes that the bodily unity of the church came from believers’ shared observation of the passion of the crucified Christ. This motif reminds us of the individual, transitive attention paid to the events of a sports match, one of the factors behind the emergence of the crowd as a collective body in the stadium. Finally, the actual appeal of Pope Pius’s text arose out of the secularly but not theologically paradoxical idea that the concentration on the physical suffering of Christ was, for the church, grounds for “the greatest joy and elation.”

It is precisely in these three dimensions of meaning that the argumentative structure of the 1943 encyclical helps give form to my continued reflections on the internal experience of stadium crowds. I am interested in understanding how a sense of communal elation can arise out of the transitive attention of laterally associated individuals on a physical event: this elation is what the adjective *vertical* in the

chapter title refers to. Of course, the verticality in the stadium is neither transcendent nor religious. When a certain atmosphere emerges in that particular space, it does not propel the spectators into another, higher sphere. Quite on the contrary, the worldliness of stadium events determines their intensity, as a celebration of real presence: earthly intensity cannot propel us into other realms. Under no circumstances have spectator sports replaced religion, as some particularly imaginative intellectuals would have it—and the stadiums are not our cathedrals, even when they imitate their atmosphere and sometimes also their architecture. A further aspect, neither religious nor vertical, adds to this effect of elation: our opposition to the spectators and players of the “other side.” This is an essential, though precarious, element of all team sports.

With the above theological elements in mind, I would now like to explain what it means to speak about stadium events as rituals of presence. I will then use the intrinsically complex terms *intensity* and *rhythm*, both close to the concept of presence, to describe two versions of the crowd’s ascent to a state of elation. Less philosophically put: this chapter is concerned with a specific experience of the self that is activated by individual concentration on movements, an experience that only occurs in crowds and that resembles neither the structures of subjective behavior (agitation, for instance) nor natural phenomena (like a storm).

The perspective of presence, as will be required by my analysis of intensity and rhythm in a crowd, was already

assumed when I hesitated to speak of masses as if they were acting subjects or even individuals. In general, we can approach every intentional object, every perception that takes on form in our consciousness, from two perspectives: We can either interpret these objects, persons, or collectives, by attributing to them a function or intention (in this case, the masses unavoidably become acting subjects). Or, alternatively, we can approach an object, person, or collective in a relationship of presence—that is, by relating their concrete, physical appearance to our own bodies (the original meaning of the verb *praesesse* is “to stand in front of someone/something”). Since the 17th century witnessed the emergence of rationality and reason as the necessary prerequisites to social life in Western culture, the presence premise has increasingly become an exception in our relationships with the objects of this world. However, in some special contexts it is still dominant: for instance, as we have seen, in the lateral connection between bodies in the stadium, and most likely also in our transitive concentration on the bodies of the playing field. And this is precisely what explains the special status of stadium events as rituals of presence within a form of everyday existence that otherwise primarily plays out in acts of world-interpretation.

Under which conditions and with what consequences do relationships of presence shape stadium events and make them matter so much to us? My first answer to this question will be informed by the term *intensity*, which has become, as I have said, a favorite word of our present

moment (and its sports vocabulary). Here, I use *intensity* in the sense of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (who has written one of the very few reflections on the concept). Deleuze postulates that intensity always refers to movements outside of ourselves, initiated by a multitude of individual entities who are similar or identical to each other. At first, these entities are simply near each other, without being bound by a specific pattern to a certain relationship. Deleuze calls such collections of entities without a specific relationship “bodies without organs”—and here, I see an affinity to my description of the lateral, unempathetic relationships between the bodies in a crowd. Bodies without organs, or bodies arrayed laterally in a crowd, seem to resonate with movements that pass through them more strongly than bodies with an organic structure or within contoured groups.

We can relate to intense vertical movements outside of ourselves without being able to control them; they are less specific feelings than degrees of being-activated. In general, movements of intensity transition from the aforementioned body without organs, as a state of absolute openness in the relation between individual entities (entropy, every relationship is possible) to an end point of absolutely determined certainty (negentropy, there are no more open possibilities) that we can describe with words like *ecstasy*, *black hole*, *addiction*, *orgasm*, and *death*, but also by the concept of elation. All of these terms refer to end points where we no longer have a subjective choice and can no longer control our behavior and actions—this

is usually experienced as a negative dependency, but sometimes also as a positive, unconditional existential fulfillment. Every game we watch bridges the expanse between entropy and negentropy, between a sheer endless openness to whatever might come to pass, and a final point where nothing more is possible, much less reversible.

But how do the movements and processes of intensity transfer to a crowd of spectators in a stadium? How does intensity take hold of them, and how do they come to embody it? There are three potentially parallel mechanisms at play here. First of all, under the condition of nearness inside the stadium and in light of the crowd's swarm-like tendencies, there exists that latent, pent up movement that always contains the potential for escalation and for violence. In a crowd, that is, we experience a desire for movement that cannot be fully articulated. I associate the permanent drum beat that accompanies the game in many South American stadiums with this unrealized potential for escalation—as well as the fear of being crushed inside the stadium itself. Secondly, our transitive perception of certain movements on the playing field (such as Uwe Seeler's goals, or Toni Turek's saves during the final minutes of the World Championship in 1954), multiplied by our mirror neurons, can lead to explosions of intensity—to moments, for example, when spectators who have never seen each other before embrace as a result of their shared observations. Thirdly, and above all, dramatic developments within a game release energy,

thanks to the lateral presence of many bodies. This energy can transform into communal, collective elation.

I have never experienced this more clearly than during that great 2000 rugby match in Sydney. The lead constantly alternated between the two rival teams and, as a result, both fan groups found themselves in a state of euphoria by the end of the game. The same was true for the semifinal of the 1970 soccer world championships in Mexico, won by Italy in overtime against Germany—a game that some spectators of my generation in both countries still refer to as the greatest of all times. I have not succeeded in identifying specific patterns of connection between sequences of events during a game and the activation of a sense of elation amongst the fans, but I do not doubt that such patterns exist.

Moments of elation in the stadium arise from the escalation of one's own potential for energy, together with a synchrony of movement with other bodies. During this process, a physical mode of existence is made accessible to my individual consciousness, a sort of bodily vibration that I can later desire and hope to return to. Once triggered, this mode seems to be mostly devoid of content; it is not bound to the memory of the images that caused it. The recollection of Adi Preißler's strange gesture brings me back to the first great stadium experience of my life, yet I do not associate the gesture with a specific meaning—but rather, with that feeling of empty, physical elation that made me into a lifelong fan.

Certainly, our awareness of the opposing fans (not only the other team's players) contributes to the process of intensity. This triggers a paradoxical simultaneity of aggressive impulses along with the desire to withdraw into our own collective body, both of which strengthen the impression of homogeneity within each group. Only seldom can the antagonism between two opposing crowds of fans be overcome and transformed into feelings of euphoria shared by both spectators and athletes (as was the case in Sydney)—I myself usually react, however outstanding the match, with impulses of diffuse aggression if the final score disappoints me. This was the case during the now-canonized 2013 Champions League final between Borussia Dortmund and Bayern München, which I watched on a television screen in a bar in Santiago de Chile. When Arjen Robben made the last-second goal that led to Munich's 2:1 victory, I swept all the still-full glasses from the table in a single, unstoppable movement, in front of the group of friends and strangers I had treated to a drink after Dortmund tied the game a few minutes earlier. Would such a reaction have been possible during a transmission of a so-called ghost game? In any event, I know from long experience that I must—and not without difficulty—hold back various provocative remarks about the opposing fans when I leave the Stanford stadium after a defeat at the hands of Berkeley.

But a few hours after the end of the game, and certainly by the next morning, a more or less epic recollection of the quality of the match, of its charismatic moments and

its drama, will win out—there never even seems to be a proper moment for feelings of sadness. This said, I am well acquainted with violent or aggressive tendencies in the stadium, and I do not deny the risks associated with them (in light of my age, perhaps the greatest personal risk is one of bodily safety). What should I do in order to avoid such impulses, without merely suppressing them? My attempt at an answer will take into account a final aspect of the process of intensity.

As I said before, I agree with Deleuze's observation that we experience intensity in the form of a process outside and independent from ourselves. This means on the one hand that we must consciously succumb to such a process ("throw ourselves into it, as long as it is still available" seems to be an adequate description) in order to reach a state of elation—even if this effort is not always successful. However, on the other side of the process of intensity is the possibility (and necessity) of a timely exit, at the last moment, before frustration and aggression have paralyzed our self-awareness and individual will. But such a letting-go can be shockingly difficult when our own team is inexorably approaching defeat: we want to keep our distance, but we are already a part of a seemingly irreversible dynamic. Perhaps this is the reason why the long-term existence of fans is not solely a factor of their team's success.

Particularly in baseball, the special attraction of popular teams is indeed often bound up with years of failure at pivotal moments, a fact that is sometimes interpreted

and glossed over as a curse, an epic fateful revenge for a particular past decision. It is for this reason, perhaps, that baseball fans may be particularly enamored of statistics—their sport can never really be controlled even by the best athletes and teams, as chance always plays a visible role in their victories and defeats. The Boston Red Sox, for example, had to endure 68 years without a national championship after they relinquished the incomparable Babe Ruth to the New York Yankees for \$125,000 in 1918. From one year to the next, the baton was passed from the Red Sox to the Yankees, who had had only scarce success before 1918. But when the Red Sox finally won the World Series again in 2004, their popularity did not really increase—precisely because they lost their aura's specific allure along with their curse.

Even more telling and absurd is the story of the Hanshin Tigers, founded in 1935 as a franchise of the Japanese baseball league. Their Koshien Stadium, always sold out, lies between Osaka and Kobe—and has, possibly, the highest number of spectators per year in all of professional sports. Since 1985, the Tigers have not claimed a single victory in the national championship of their sport. Here, the curse at play can be traced back to the victory celebrations of 1985, when a handful of euphoric Tigers fans who looked like various players of the victorious team leaped into a canal, watched by an enormous crowd. Since none of the Japanese fans, however, managed to resemble the bearded American star pitcher Randy Bass, they decided to throw a life-size statue of

Colonel Sanders, the figurehead for Kentucky Fried Chicken, into the canal in his place. The statue has never been fully retrieved from the water—and the Tigers are still waiting for their next national victory.

The term *rhythm* invokes a quite different set of aspects in our examination of the elation associated with crowds. Elias Canetti dedicated a chapter of his book *The Masses and Power* to the concept, hypothesizing that the rhythm of the masses is primarily a function of the “stamping” of their feet. As a central—and, for him, frightening—example, Canetti describes the Haka war dance practiced by the Maoris of New Zealand, apparently without realizing that the country’s national rugby team performs precisely this choreography of aggressive gestures and contorted grimaces before each game, to the ecstatic enthusiasm of the fans. Canetti never makes it further than the rather banal observation that “the intensity of a shared menace is characteristic of the Haka,” a commentary that, together with his prerequisite contempt for the masses, makes it clear that he fails to grasp the complexity of rhythm and its consequences for crowd behavior.

All phenomena that we call rhythm can be described as practical answers to the question as to how a temporal object in the proper sense can have a form. Temporal objects are all phenomena that only exist in their temporal development: spoken language, music, and weather, for example, in opposition to linguistic structures, pictures, and landscapes. I understand form as the “simultaneity of self- and other-reference” (the form of a circle,

for instance, refers simultaneously to the circle itself and to the rest of the world outside of the circle). The problem of compatibility between form and temporal objects—that is, the problem solved by rhythm—arises from the fact that a form which constantly changes (for example, from a circle to a square to a triangle) can no longer be understood as a form. The practical solution, however, is found when a stable sequence of consecutive forms returns again and again to the original form (circle, square, triangle; circle, square, triangle, etc.); that is, when there is a rhythm. Only then can the stability of the repeated, rhythmic sequence of forms replace the stability of a single, unchanging form.

Without necessarily having to understand all of its aspects, we associate rhythm in everyday life with three main functions: the coordination of bodily movements, our ability to recall memories (their “mnemotechnical” function), and the effect of conjuring up (that is, the impression that objects of our imagination become substantially present under the influence of rhythm). The first function, that of physical coordination, is important for bodies experiencing the impulse of pent-up movement; its explanation starts with the differentiation between two types of connection between systems (or bodies). Second order connections, where for example languages serve as a medium, are productive: that is, states emerge within this connection that would not have arisen without it. By contrast, first order connections, or connections whose medium is rhythm, are nonproduc-

tive, because the same sequences of states traverse them again and again; in human beings, this means that these first order connections take place mostly without our awareness. For this reason, bodies come together under the influence of rhythm and in the form of a crowd. Due to their lack of awareness, they fall easily into a shared rhythm—as demonstrated, for instance, by the existence of military music.

In my explanation of the memory function of rhythm, I will make use of two words from ancient Greek: *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* is ongoing time, without a beginning or an end, something we associate particularly with movement. When we identify movements as rhythmic, however, we take for granted that they repeatedly arrive at beginning- and end-points—meaning that they do have a form within time. Rhythm, or time as form (I call this *kairos*), imprints itself upon or cuts into open, running time (*chronos*). In time that continually repeats itself as form, all moments from past and present tend to appear concurrent, because they never remain firmly anchored in the past. And this makes it plausible that the knowledge of the past preserved in rhythmic form does not become lost, but instead remains accessible to us thanks to the rhythmic form itself.

This has two consequences for my theory of the crowd. First, rhythm can give a crowd its temporal form: the masses are constituted by rhythm (before the game) and only disperse once the rhythm has disappeared after the game. Here, the singing of the fans is particularly effective.

At the same time, memories become present under the influence of rhythm (for instance, with the drumbeats in South American stadiums). These memories can be reinforced today by video projections in the stadium—but they have also always been triggered by associations with the architecture of the stadium itself. In this latter possibility, old and historically charged stadiums have an advantage over new stadiums, some to an extent that is nearly surreal. In the Dortmund Stadium, I can still “remember” the dramatic victory during the 2013 Champion’s League against Málaga CF, with two goals in overtime, although I was not even present. During my night in La Bombonera, too, I dreamt of games that only existed in my powers of imagination, activated by the architecture around me.

Finally, how might we explain conjuring up—that is, the impression that objects or bodies in our imagination sometimes seem to become tangibly present—as a function of rhythm? To answer this question, we will take a productive detour through an almost century-old thought experiment by the American philosopher George Herbert Mead. His query concerned the early *Homo sapiens*—a *Homo sapiens*, I must add, that Mead considered to have a lower “tension of consciousness” than contemporary humans. What happened when this *Homo sapiens* heard an unusual sound? Strange noises, Mead wrote, must have evoked images in his imagination: images of animals that were stronger than him and of animals that were weaker. This process directly triggered innervation and muscle movements: of flight when the other animal was imag-

ined to be stronger, or attack when the animal was perceived as weaker. Either way, the *Homo sapiens* reacted as if the imagined animal were physically present, or to put it differently: the perceived noise conjured up the animal in his imagination. The immediate reaction triggered by this form of presence would not have taken place, Mead concluded, if this early human had reacted to the world with the higher “tension of consciousness” humans possess today. For it is this higher tension that allows us to filter the contents of our imagination, and so interrupt both the impression of immediacy engendered by the imagined real presence as well as our physical reaction to it.

The impression of the real presence of other bodies, produced by the influence of rhythm on a state of lowered awareness, resembles what the New Testament calls “transfiguration”—that is, the paradoxical unity of a presence that is at once distant and tangible. In this sense the gestures and movements of the athletes are transfigured before our eyes, when we follow them in transitive attentiveness from within the crowd. Their bodies and movements are, on the one hand, distant from us, because as spectators we cannot participate in their competition; but at the same time they are, as it were, real and tangibly present in our imagination due to the rhythm of the crowd. Such transfigured bodies, however, can hardly become the bearers of morals and values, as is so often suggested by pedagogically well-intentioned “friends of the sport.” Differently than in our primary perception,

these bodies become present in our imagination with increased intensity. Jonah Lomu of New Zealand's rugby team, whom I had the privilege of witnessing in one of his greatest games, was and is present in my imagination as if I had been the one playing against him. Three dimensionally present, real, irresistible, and nonchalant—that is, transfigured.

Friedrich Nietzsche wrote about transfiguration in his work *The Birth of Tragedy*: “To the dithyrambic chorus is now assigned the task of exciting the minds of the hearers to such a Dionysian pitch, that, when the tragic hero appears on the stage, they do not behold in him an unshapely masked man, but a visionary figure, born as it were of their own ecstasy.” The tragic theater of Dionysus in Athens with its “visionary figures” born of ecstasy, the Church as container of the physically real and transfigured presence of Christ, the stadiums of today—these were and are ritual spaces, where human beings become collective mystical bodies capable of conjuring up other bodies in transfiguration. Once again, I insist that sports, stadiums, and their crowds do not need the comparison with the Eucharist or Greek tragedy in order to win some sort of—inadequate—cultural prestige. Such comparisons are only productive insofar as they help us produce complex descriptions of the experience of sports as a mass-experience.

The effects of transfiguration, the conjuring up of the past, and the coordination of individual bodies under the influence of rhythm—these elements have always been

connected with the intensity of a potential, anonymous movement outside of ourselves that can lift us into a state of elation, or drive us to violence. We experience such moments in the stadium-crowd as sublime, above and beyond the compass of the human mind: sublime not because of the objects of our attention, but because our reaction to them transcends our every attempt at description or analysis.

7 THE STADIUM AS RITUAL OF THE CROWD

More frequently than even a half-century ago, contemporary mass events take place in stadiums. Since the late 1970s and the rise of Freddie Mercury's band Queen, "arena rock" has not only become a fact of life, but also a popular genre of music in and of itself, with the song "We Are the Champions" as its ultimate exemplar. Much more recently, on July 23, 2019, the final church service of the congress of the German Lutheran Church took place in the country's largest stadium (although the number of people attending, 32,000, was deemed "a disappointment"). By contrast, however, the briefly renewed hope in the political efficacy of a spontaneous mass gathering has meanwhile faded—along with our memories of the stirring scenes during the Arab Spring and the Maidan demonstration in Kiev.

My comment that "the masses find their ultimate expression in the stadium" may have been altogether misleading: for to assume that any phenomenon has a per-

fect or solely correct version would be to engage in pseudo-platonic and pseudo-philosophical speculations of the worst kind. I should thus rephrase myself. In this examination of stadium crowds and sports spectators, it has helped to avoid two analytical lenses: the traditional contempt for the masses and their equally unconvincing heroization as agents of history. Both labels associate the masses with the subject concept: positively, as a heroic collective subject with a superior status, or negatively, as an environment which ostensibly reduces the intelligence of its individual subjects.

In contrast to the above, my approach to the stadium tries to reveal a rarely discussed, double complexity of the crowd: namely the ambivalence between its well-known violent tendencies and the possibility that within it we have access to an otherwise inaccessible intensity, one which can lead to elation. We can therefore say—to phrase things differently—that a crowd may not always need a stadium to be fulfilled, but that it becomes an intellectually worthwhile object within its context.

In any event, I will not further pursue a theoretically driven analysis of crowds (among other reasons because such processes of theoretical development never really come to an end). Rather, my two final chapters will concern themselves with the direct description of the mass experience of sports in the stadium from two concrete perspectives. Both perspectives will present the crowd as a phenomenon of presence—and therefore, as I have explained in my discussion of presence, I will not interpret

its functions or acts as attempts to change the world. From the perspective of presence, these functions and acts in time are replaced above all by rituals—that is, by forms of the self-unfolding of phenomena in space (and I am referring to rituals in the broader sense of contemporary language, not specifically to religious rituals). Such rituals function as choreographies that we can enact again and again, without changing the world. Positioning stadium events as rituals, on the basis of my two theory chapters, will allow us to experience them in productively alienating terms.

The special choreography of the stadium usually begins some distance from the structure itself. At home, at work, at the train station, we feel drawn to the stadium on the day of the game—and even here, the draw is also a physical one. On fall Saturdays with college football home games, I never really stop my work in Green Library as late as I had originally planned. I just cannot concentrate anymore, and I need much less than the usual fifteen minutes to walk from my office to the stadium (my wife says she does not want to “run” with me anymore, so we meet at our usual seats, row eleven, right at the forty-yard line). In Dortmund, there is a brightly marked yellow path from the downtown central station to the stadium in the south end of the city—a corridor, and for some a racetrack, but certainly not a walkway where one stops and chats. Stadiums are the powerful, unrivaled magnets of the game day, the center of existence for the fans, without alternative or distraction.

My pulse beats faster as the stadium draws closer, whether in Stanford, Dortmund, or elsewhere. In Istanbul, miles away from the stadium, police direct the fans of the great local clubs Fenerbahce, Galatasary, and Besiktas to separate paths and parking lots, in order to avoid explosions of violence. Personally, I always want to arrive early so as to experience the half-empty stadium, before it fills both too quickly and too slowly for me. The stadium around me becomes another space, another reality, one where I lose sight of everyday life in my feelings of concentrated intensity. Such a process of distancing from daily existence happens in several stages: the teams come onto the field to warm up, they vanish again into the changing rooms, and then return to the field in a more formal choreography. Eight minutes before the starting whistle, the Dortmund speakers play "You'll Never Walk Alone," a stadium anthem imported many years ago from Anfield Road in Liverpool. The SÜD sings along and so draws close to the game, as close as they can be without being a part of it.

Even in covered stadiums, where we sense the architectural form more intensely, the hockey ice or basketball court remains at a distance, separated by a plexiglass wall or by nothing at all—and yet, for the fans, they are also eerily close. In baseball, a few spectators are sometimes even allowed to sit on the grass of the playing field, almost in the game but yet still removed. From this especially distant nearness, our only desire is to watch the game, to witness the forms that arise from the clash between transfigured bodies, forms that vanish against all probability as

soon as they come into being. These are forms as event, forms that we can experience without embodying them.

At the beginning of the game, the stadium is doubly charged with suspense: there is our team and the other team, and ourselves and the other fans (we and our team, the other fans and their team). As the game goes on, we and the other fans become mystical bodies, both dependent on our teams but not identical with them, whereas the referees always seem to belong to the other mystical body because we experience them as a potential impediment to the development of our own team's plays. The elementary substance of the stadium is split into two zones and their subsequent energies; there is nothing more than this. Two substances and two energies, shaped and charged in opposition to each other, without overlap. Particularly in the greatest local derbies, this absolute separation leads to the sort of ecstasy that can only arise in stadiums, because the stadium makes visible the tensions of the cities and all of their stories, and compresses them, hardens them.

Adriano Celentano, a lifelong fan (*tifoso*) of Inter Milan and therefore an opponent of Milan, the other team of his city (and the quarter final rival of Borussia Dortmund in February of 1958), eulogized the excitement of the derby in 1965 with one of the best soccer anthems of all time, "Eravamo in Centomila." Even the seemingly simple title is interesting, because the preposition *in* makes the speaker and audience of the text—a him and a her, respectively—into bodies in a crowd of 100,000 spectators. This all takes

place in the Milan stadium, at that time still called San Siro after the surrounding neighborhood (the renovated stadium bears the name of Giuseppe Meazza, the charismatic forward from the Italian world championships of 1934 and 1938). Tragically, she is a fan of Milan, he of Inter—but he saw her at the derby “among 100,000 spectators, from one end of the stadium to the other” (the Italian words can also be translated as “from one goal to the other”): “I smiled at you / and you said yes.” He can only hope to see her again after the game is over—but she “disappears with a guy in the tram.” Even in post-game existence, there can be no overlap between the mystical bodies of the derby.

“If I am not mistaken, we both watched Inter Milan together,” he says at the beginning of the song. But after the first rushed snatches of conversation (“Pardon me!” “What’s up?” “Where are you going?” “Why do you ask?”), she stops responding to him entirely—the *bella mora*, the “beautiful dark-haired woman,” the Milan fan. It would have been a matter of “a game between the two of us,” he sings: “You shot a goal (*un gol*) / right into the gate posts (*la porta*) of my heart / and I understood / that you are the only one for me.” Alas, she does not reply. “Io dell’In (*Inter!*) / Lei del Mi (*Milan!*),” he laments—and so ends this song of a tragic derby love, one which can never be fulfilled: “Io dell-In / Lei del Mi—o bella mora.”

With three Italian and two European championships, the mid-60s were the years of the Grande Inter in black-and-blue, the Inter of Sandro Mazzola, in whose honor I

grew the moustache that has since never disappeared from my face, when I worked for a few months near Milan in 1972. At that time, Mazzola's rival Gianni Rivera was also still shooting passes for the red-and-black Milan team, with such a casual elegance that he must have won his way into every Milanese mother-in-law's heart. But it was Inter's coach Helenio Herrera, born in Argentina and raised in France, who invented the still-practiced, hyper-rational elegance of the Catenaccio, the perfect defense strategy that was able to serve up 1:0 victories again and again on the basis of a single ingenious counterstrike, and who surrounded Sandro Mazzola with defense players like Tarcisio Burgnich and Giacinto Facchetti, together with the flankers Mario Corso (left) and Jair from Brazil (right). "C'è sole!" a *tifoso* from Inter shouted in the pouring rain, embracing me, as Facchetti relayed the ball left to Mazzola and then right to Jair, and Corso drove the ball into the goal of AS Rome with his left foot and won the game.

Soccer has inherited an intellectual playing style from the rivalry between Inter and Milan, but no other derby has also produced a anthem with such a sadly realistic timbre. For the insurmountable separation in "Eravamo in Centomila" is the condition of the intensity between the two mystical bodies that make up the crowd; there is no friendly alternative. Has anybody ever really experienced a moment of excitement when the soft wave of "La Ola" rolls over all the spectators of the stadium, and they become a single unity in their devotion? The much acclaimed "Ola"

is nothing more than a symptom of boredom, when it sweeps through two stadium blocs in a sole collective movement during the halftime of games that have already been decided or which do not have any dramatic meaning. “La Ola” does not belong to the choreography of the stadium—whereas those other, strange, eventfully explosive moments of euphoria that sweep up all the spectators (as at the end of the great rugby game in Sydney) cannot have any permanent form.

But if it is true that there cannot be any real stadium experiences without this invariable structure of division, antagonism, and potential aggression, then each sport must have its own modality of transitive and transfiguring attention on the players and the game. Nowhere, for instance, are rivalries more fierce, long-lasting, and deep than in baseball: I am a fan of the San Francisco Giants, and I therefore had to learn to actively forget that some of my colleagues and even friends burn for the Los Angeles Dodgers. Baseball centers less on the emergence of a form from multiple player-bodies than on the confrontation between two individual players: the pitcher who throws the hard white ball to the kneeling catcher from his mount, and the player at bat who stands between them, and tries to strike the ball as it flies from one to the other. To the fans, this confrontation has all the psychological suspense of chess and all the potentially devastating physical energy of boxing. For both teams and for the attention of the spectators, everything depends on this confrontation.

In basketball, so many points are scored over the course of a game that a victory or defeat rarely comes down to a single decisive shot. Particularly in the professional leagues—college basketball is another matter—the fans are therefore more drawn to the fluidity of the team-play and the artistic value added by individual shots than to a particular tension or rivalry. Even though a slam dunk only counts for two points, it thus produces a feeling of irresistible dominance—just as a three-point shot by Steph Curry that passes through the basket without ever touching the hoop is a moment of absolute perfection. In a different way, I can sense the acceleration of a massive forward in hockey, his expected yet sudden pain at the impact with another body—and his weightless connection to the puck gliding before his stick. In football, the time between the downs, so unbearable for soccer fans, is always too brief for the complicated thought experiments carried out by both teams as they plot their strategy for the coming plays—until an entirely different offensive plan is transfigured and realized in movement, playing off the bodies of the defense (or breaking upon them).

Despite the obsessive discussions in recent years about its systems and their varying probabilities of success, soccer has remained a team sport of collective improvisation. As in hockey, and unlike games where the ball is manipulated by hand, possession of the ball in soccer is always precarious and contentious, a fact that makes the development of the game only vaguely predictable. Soccer lives

not on sophisticated strategy or dramatic confrontations, but on intuitions, brief hopes, disappointments, and reactions that the opposing team must adapt to, as a swarm, without forgetting the mutual antagonism at play.

Every team sport thus has its own tonality and rhythm. The fans experience and nearly come to embody these aspects, which produce different forms of coherence depending on the sport. Do baseball fans feel like they are in the hands of fate? Do basketball fans conjure up ecstasies of perfection? Does the spirit of military thought live on in football, and existentialism in soccer? I will not pursue these questions and comparisons any further, because they threaten to become banal in their ingenious arbitrariness. Certainly, the varying forms and atmospheres of different games find particular resonances in the bodies of their spectators, without there being an automatic link between the two (for instance, the most physically aggressive games do not necessarily have the most aggressive fans). All mass sports, whether baseball in Osaka, basketball in San Francisco, college football in Alabama, hockey in Montreal, or soccer in Dortmund, fill their stadiums with different substances—substances we can come to know through experience, without being able to capture them in words.

Above all, the different processes and dramas of individual games trigger the movements of intensity we spectators let ourselves be carried by, movements of openness or irreversibility, loaded with pent-up physical energy and composed of transfigured images in our perception.

For a fan, nothing is trivial or relaxed about the stadium; its happenings are ecstatically serious. And therefore, at the game's end the euphoria of the one mystical body cannot be any greater than it is, nor the despondency of the other any deeper. Mere contentment after a win or sadness after a defeat would be too mild.

This also is the moment where—particularly in Dortmund—the home team approaches the stands, even after disappointing games or defeats, to bid farewell to the spectators. Unlike during the game, the bodies of the players are now synchronized with the mystical body of the fans—and trigger identical, synchronous movements within it. The team is thus no longer removed from the spectators: their farewell is a sort of mutual release from transfiguration, a return to the world of everyday life that the members of the crowd had wanted to—and did—leave behind for a few hours. Now they return to a different type of seriousness, one that is shallow and no longer ecstatic.

Mass rituals in the stadium presuppose the presence of a team sport, because we associate spectator sports, culturally and economically, with our fascination for teams. Historically, however, the rise of team sports to their current level of popularity has taken place over the past 150 years. Ancient Greece had no team sports; the collaboration between the charioteers of the various *factiones* in Roman culture was more similar to the racing sports of today than to soccer, basketball, or rugby. At the same time, the few remaining large-scale track-and-field events

that take place in front of a crowd do not produce the atmosphere of mass intensity I have been describing: their spectators are rather specialists or former athletes than fans. It seems almost impossible to explain the historically late onset of team sports, today so incomparably dominant. Should we assume that the progressive development of individuality as the existential norm in Western societies has made collectivity increasingly appealing? Do those who spend their days alone in front of a screen yearn all the more for communal experience? In their basic condition, these speculations converge with my explanation for full stadiums: that which is vanishing from the center of daily life becomes attractive on its periphery.

In any event, it is possible for two main reasons to connect the phenomenon of spectator masses, as we know them today, with the emergence of team sports. Firstly, this is because team sports, unlike individual sports, imply a competition between only two sides. Without exception, there is another team and its fans, against which we position ourselves as the opposing crowd. In individual sports, the situation is more diffuse: runners, swimmers, or gymnasts have multiple opponents. Secondly, the shared concentration on one's "own" players and the transfiguration of their movements contribute to the formation of fans into groups that can become crowds, much more so than the concentration on individual athletes. Perception in a group triggers an impulse to associate with it, to attach oneself to it and by so doing to enlarge it.

After the end of the game and the team's farewells (that is, after the release from transfiguration), we are exhausted. For the fans, multidimensional intensity is the equivalent of the athlete's physical participation in the game. Hardly do we feel a resistance to our departure from the stadium, nor are we particularly sad about it. We know the date of the next event, as is typical for any ritual. And thus we leave slowly, without another beer, perhaps just half a cigarette outside the stadium—and in the bars, too, the excitement is over. The evening after a stadium event is not one for sophisticated meals or brilliant conversation; we do not even want to talk about the game itself. Our batteries are empty, pleasantly empty—emptiness instead of relaxation. The fans have expended all the concentration, intimacy, and energy they are capable of.

What would we lose, in a world without full stadiums? This is a question for us, the fans, not for society at large. Most likely we would miss the physical elation without content that draws us into the stadium and is unique to our experience there. To be sure, the loss of stadium crowds would eliminate their inherent risk of violence and all its consequences. But while there is no educational and certainly no moral value in being part of a crowd, the form and the aesthetics of the games we love change without its presence: not because crowds are efficient supporters of their teams, as some friendly athletes like to suggest—but because the teams and their stars play for the crowd much more than for their coaches and for their bank accounts, perhaps even more than they know.

8 “YOU’LL NEVER WALK ALONE”

Dortmund, March 13, 2016

There is no argument against and, most likely, no antidote for the crowd’s affinity with violence, especially in a stadium. Their willingness to split into antagonistic blocs is real, as is their aggression against the opposing fans; the general atmosphere of the stadium can be described, depending on linguistic taste, as rough, exhausting, or even tragic. For their part, the Ultras would be as ill-suited as ambassadors of peace as they would be patient and rational negotiators with Germany’s soccer associations. Whoever still expresses sympathy for the crowd, however vague (for what do I know of the Ultras?), risks being accused of trivializing violence or, worse still for one’s intellectual reputation, of entertaining a pseudo-leftist, or perhaps pseudo-right-wing, romanticism. And yet it is true that stadium events experienced in the middle of a crowd are among the best things that life has to offer. I hope I have succeeded in this book in demonstrating somewhat plausibly why this is the case for me

and for countless others—and what I mean when I speak of the special elation of the stadium.

Now this is not an apologetic or educational text aimed at improving stadium events. The experiences that are at stake for me, I want to affirm one final time, would hardly be possible without crowds, without Ultras, without the risk of violence. An important question, perhaps the most important one when it comes to the future of stadium events, thus concerns the minimization of risk—but its answer, unfortunately, lies completely outside of my capabilities. I can only repeat that I am not interested in stadiums that have the atmosphere of a classical concert hall or an academic seminar. But since I have no fully rational arguments for the social or political value of the stadium crowd that can explain my preferences, I will at least try to illustrate its other, positive potential with one final example from the recent past—and thus highlight, one last time, what we would lose if ghost games or concert hall rules should become the norm in the stadium.

The example I want to use leads us to the events of March 13, 2016, in the Dortmund stadium (where else?), officially named Signal Iduna Park or, less corporately, the Westfalenstadion. From an athletic point of view, it was one of those unfortunately typical game days during the past decade of Bundesliga history, although the BVB was set to finish the season as the best second of all time. Nevertheless, as almost every year, the championships were already decided in favor of Bayern-München by the beginning of spring. It therefore fell to Borussia to reduce

the eight-point lead of the frontrunner to a less discouraging five points, in a home game against Mainz 05—a very achievable task, though not one particularly promising of glory. Borussia indeed succeeded, in front of sold-out stands and despite its difficulty, typical of its home games, to quickly find a rhythm strong enough to draw in the spectators and the team itself. In any event and also as usual, by halftime the score was 1:0, thanks to a goal by Marco Reus.

In the seventy-third minute Shingi Kagawa brought the tally to 2:0. But by the middle of the second halftime in this seemingly normal match, this goal and even the final score were utterly forgotten—because the SÜD had not made a single sound after the teams resumed their places on the field. There were no songs or cheers, no waving of the black-and-yellow flags and scarves, not even protests or whistles directed at the referee. Only those who know the Dortmund Stadium could possibly realize the magnitude of what was suddenly missing; the video footage that we have from this afternoon gives us a glimpse of the disconcertion of the players and trainers, especially of the home team. Yet suddenly, a few minutes before the final whistle, as if the game had now become entirely irrelevant, the SÜD began to sing. It was their beloved stadium anthem, "You'll Never Walk Alone"—usually only played once during the pregame ritual, but now completely unaccompanied by the loudspeakers. And then they sang it again after the game had ended, while the players made their usual farewells—except this

time, in a completely unprecedented move, the team as well as the spectators from Mainz joined the members of the SÜD in chorus.

March 13, 2016, has gone down in the collective memory of the Dortmund soccer world. It was thus easy for me to find a fan who was present in the SÜD that afternoon, happy to report with pride and exactitude on what had happened. Jan-Henrik Gruszecki, a fan in his mid-thirties, stresses that he belongs to the Dortmund Ultras but is also in contact with the management of Borussia, as a sort of mediator between the franchise's interests and the energy of the SÜD. During the halftime break on that March afternoon, Jan-Henrik says, he saw paramedics "running back and forth" on the southwest side of the stands. They had come to try to resuscitate an 80-year-old spectator who had suffered a heart attack and later died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. Another fan, who also received medical treatment, survived.

And then, Jan-Henrick explains, a message ran through the entire crowd. News of the heart attack and of the subsequent death spread and accelerated until it had reached every corner of the standing bleachers, though there did not seem to be a central messenger responsible for the communication. Should one call this movement a dynamic of stigmergy? "The crowd itself made the decision," my witness says. Later, he continues, "the people with the megaphones in the crowd announced that it wouldn't be proper to sing anymore." But that was already

clear to everyone present; "there wasn't any sort of manipulation at play." How it happened that the SÜD suddenly began to sing minutes before the end of the game, and then once again as the "team walked by reverently, arm-in-arm"—this Jan-Henrick does not know.

"You'll Never Walk Alone," composed in 1945 by the famous duo Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein for the musical *Carousel*, has a singular history and unbeatably catchy lyrics. In 1963 it came to the ears of the legendary Liverpool coach Bill Shankly and above all to the Liverpool fans: it was high in the English charts at the time and had thus been played at Anfield Road in a cover version by a local band. But when the song disappeared from the charts a few weeks later and thus left the stadium repertoire, the fans protested by singing it independently—as was the case fifty-three years later in Dortmund. Both times the crowd had decided for themselves. In England, the fans have performed "You'll Never Walk Alone" before every home game of FC Liverpool since 1963, and the title has become the official motto of the club, like the slogan on a coat of arms. Along with Borussia Dortmund, a whole series of teams have taken up the song as their anthem, in Scotland, Holland, and even Greece; the appeal of its collective performance, however, has not been restricted to the world of sports. Explaining this popularity on the basis of its melody would be difficult even for specialists—there is no recipe for this sort of success, only instances of it.

The lyrics of the song itself are an accumulation of some of the most banal motifs from the Western-romantic lyric tradition. “If they only knew that a lark appears in the text,” Jan-Hendrick said, “most of the fans in the SÜD would be quite surprised.” At the same time, everyone knows what the title and the refrain mean: those are the words that truly matter in the imagination of the fans when they sing before the start of each game. They pledge their support—and almost literally their companionship—to the members of the team, sitting in the dressing rooms and awaiting the final instructions of their coach. “You’ll Never Walk Alone” is thus above all a gesture of transitive focus on the transfigured players—and, in one game after the other, it also helps transform the 24,000 BVB fans in the SÜD laterally into a single body.

It is in this second sense that the fans sang the song on March 13, 2016, before the end of the game and once more after it was over. “They did it for the relatives,” representatives of the franchise reassured reporters, noticeably relieved (as if they had really found this out by talking to people in the crowd). Above all, however, the fans sang for themselves: in celebration of the community that mattered to them so much, and in mourning for the one among them who had passed away in the solitude of individual death. As they sang they made present someone who had belonged to them, although only a few knew him personally. This beautiful inversion of the song’s meaning, now directed not at the team but at the crowd itself, probably explains why the players seemed to

Jan-Henrik to be “reverent” when they approached the SÜD—and, in an unprecedented gesture, sang with and for their own fans, together with the Mainz 05 supporters on the other side of the stadium. This was a new, different community—although a community that, of course, did not survive that early March evening.

But perhaps my thought about this other meaning of “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” one directed at the mystical body itself, does not actually apply to the events of that day in March 2016. For to speak of meanings is to transform the SÜD into a subject. I have replayed the footage of the scene over and over again in the past years, and I am often struck by its intense pathos—a pathos that even the best sermon and the most emotionally adequate funeral music could not have produced. A tender but not fragile grief, in the bodily presence of many: grief in the mystical body as a consolation of loss made present.

“A wild, entertaining ride from Maradona to Nietzsche, from the Russian Revolution to the Boston Tea Party, from Jesus to Karl Marx.”

—*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*

Anyone who has ever experienced a sporting event in a large stadium knows the energy that emanates from stands full of fans cheering on their teams. Although “the masses” have long held a thoroughly bad reputation in politics and culture, literary critic and avid sports fan Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht finds powerful, as yet unexplored reasons to sing the praises of crowds. Drawing on his experiences as a spectator in the stadiums of South America, Europe, and the US, Gumbrecht presents the stadium as “a ritual of intensity,” thereby offering a different lens through which we might capture and even appreciate the dynamic of the masses.

In presenting this alternate view, Gumbrecht enters into conversation with thinkers who were more critical of the potential of the masses, such as Gustave Le Bon, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, José Ortega y Gasset, Elias Canetti, Siegfried Kracauer, T. W. Adorno, or Max Horkheimer. A new preface written especially for the English-language edition explores college crowds as a uniquely specific phenomenon of American culture.

Pairing philosophical rigor with the enthusiasm of a true fan, Gumbrecht writes from the inside and suggests that being part of a crowd opens us up to an experience beyond ourselves.

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